



Analyze the Data not the Drivel

Trust is for imbeciles!

<https://analyzethedatanotthedrivel.org>

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Wednesday 12th August, 2020

This document is a collection of my blog entries from 2009 to the present. The opinions expressed here are entirely my own. They do not reflect the views of employers, colleagues, friends or family members. I aim to increase your blood pressure; if it isn't rising the message isn't getting through!

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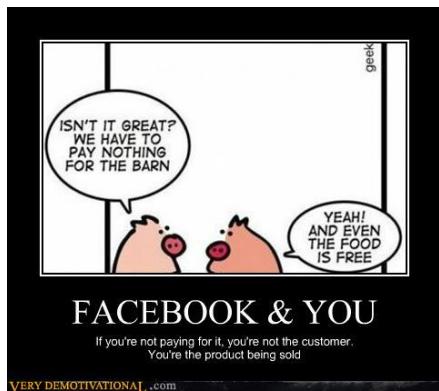
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2009

What's In it for Facebook?

Posted: 05 Sep 2009 22:44:50



Facebook is huge: they brag about a user count well north of one hundred million. If only 0.5% of their users are active that's 500,000 *concurrent users*. How many expensive servers does it take to support such a load? How much does Facebook shell out for bandwidth? What does it cost them to house the stables of *twenty something* web programmers required to keep their pages up and humming? Here's a hint for all you, "*information wants to be free*," socialists out there; **it's not free!**

Sites like Facebook blow through hundreds of thousands of dollars every month just so you can tag your friends, play silly games and post pictures of your pets. Here's an old guy question; *what's in it for Facebook?*

Do any of you seriously think Facebook is doing this for the good of mankind? Well, I hate to harsh your mellow, but nobody, and I mean *absolutely nobody*, does anything for the good of mankind. There is always payment in some form. The form varies. I prefer cash; it's crass; it's direct and it's bullshit free. The downside: there can be tax liabilities. Maybe you prefer payment in the form of self delusions: "I'm doing all this volunteer work because I am a good person." Perhaps you take Mother Teresa accolades, adulation and Nobel Peace Prizes, (going to [murders](#) and [charlatans](#) these days), and if you are a *class A numnut that ultimate noncash payment: The Order of Canada*. Live in Canada long enough, sticking to your politically correct guns, and it's yours for the taking.

Getting back to those silly Facebook games and pet pictures. Every time you boot one of these irritants it asks if it can rip your name and contact information. You want to play so you press yes. With a mouse click another marketer gains access your email, name, address and friend list. Then the silly game runs and you divulge more of yourself to perfect strangers that are spending long hours programming diversions for the *good of mankind*.

I don't care if some random manufacturer of crap learns that my favorite color is purple: ancient royalty you know. They may send me some purple junk email that will be mutilated by my spam terminators. But I am one among millions. If the same email goes out to millions a few may respond in the warm cashy way marketers seek. Facebook is a gigantic indirect marketing and data mining operation that pays the bills by parceling out user information to third parties. These parties are selling everything from soap to politicians. This is what's in it for Facebook.

I haven't seen Facebook's books so I don't know if this is a sound business or another venture capital delusion that will implode when the money runs out. Time will soon tell. In the meanwhile here is some Facebook advice.

1. **Google your name. If your Facebook page shows on the first page be very careful about what you post.** Employers are now searching social networks when screening potential employees. They will be thrilled to hear about how you puked all over the late night buffet while climbing down from your last crack high.
2. **Facebook friends are not necessarily real friends.** Does anyone have 718 real flesh and blood friends? Nobody is that popular. Nobody wants to be that popular.
3. **The more silly games, groups and postings you deploy the deeper and thicker your on-line profile becomes.** All this crap, be honest it's mostly crap, might outlive you. Do you really want your epitaph to read: Iced 1,724 in Mafia Wars.

Have I harshed your Facebook mellow?

Fake Programming

Posted: 09 Sep 2009 21:36:47

I have been a *fake programmer* for a long time. A fake programmer is someone who writes software to crush personal irritants. Fake programmers are not hackers; they don't enjoy the process of software creation; they don't work for [the man](#) and they make piss poor cubicle dwellers. Fake programmers detest industry standards and will wage silent, passive aggressive, war on anyone foolish enough to insist on them. The typical fake programmer is boiling with rage, "*what do you mean there's nothing out there that solves my problem!*" When confronted with nasty problems fake programmers will:

1. Look for ways to ignore them
2. Try to pass the buck
3. Live with suboptimal crap
4. Whine
5. Complain about lesbians on welfare
6. Yell at morons on TV
7. Write snarky blog posts

and if all else fails: **write some damn software.**

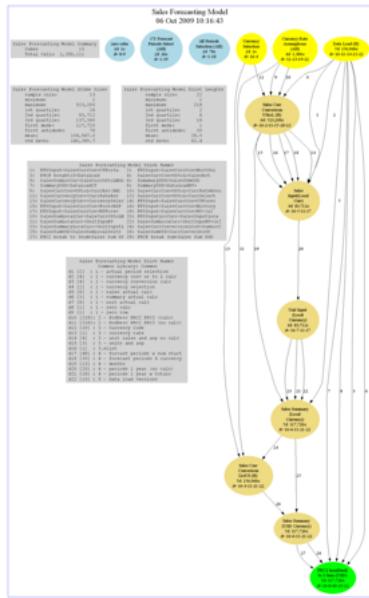
By the time the fake programmer has decided to code he is looking for the quickest and least painful solution to his problem. Remember the fake programmer doesn't care about your problems and won't live by your rules. He only wants to kill his problem and get his blood pressure back to normal.

Fake programmers will use industry standard languages and tools if they provide the quickest fix. Of course this is rarely the case. At this point fake and *real* programmers diverge. Real programmers will stick to their standard software guns and plod along. The fake programmer says screw that; let's stake out this vampire!

I recently drove a stake through the — “no decent [IBM/Cognos Planning](#) model diagram tool” — vampire. In my day job I wrestle with financial planning software. Corporate planning software is an *irritant rich* environment. My biggest complaint was the lack of an automatic way to quickly and accurately outline the contents of a Cognos model. Without such a guide you will be at the mercy of “documentation”, (don’t make me laugh) , or worse, Cognos Planning’s [ultra-sucky user interface](#). Either way you can kiss your weekends good bye.

Fortunately, I am an excellent fake J programmer. [J is my favorite programming language](#). What’s J you ask? You have never heard of it and that’s to bad for you! You have deprived your brain of a [tool of thought](#) and my human side feels for you: of course the outer fake programmer doesn’t give a rat’s ass. Using [J’s excellent graphviz addon](#) I can generate two Cognos Planning [*.csv](#) files containing model metadata and then apply my [analystgraphs](#) script to generate accurate, blood pressure reducing, diagrams like:

If you are interested in these diagrams feel free to download and use my J scripts. Of course you will have to learn enough J to run them.



Cognos Planning model structure

Laws or Suggestions

Posted: 13 Sep 2009 21:15:38



The other day while torturing myself with CNN I heard [Henry Waxman](#), that living argument for congressional term limits, tell us that the new, all singing and dancing, US health care bill would not fund abortions or pick up the tab for illegal immigrants. Maybe Henry is telling the truth, hey it could happen, pigs can fly if they're dropped high enough, but I suspect Henry is confused about laws and suggestions.

Laws come in many forms and flavors but all laws mathematical, scientific and legal have a common trait: *enforcement*. Mathematical laws, theorems if you will, are self enforcing. If you accept the fundamentals or axioms of a theory and adhere to clear logical rules of inference you don't have a choice about accepting valid results or proofs. A sure sign of *crankhood* is the steadfast refusal to accept mathematical results. To this day we still run into [circle squarers](#). They're a dying breed and I find their insanity kind of cute. If only π was an [algebraic](#)

Henry Waxman
accepting valid results or proofs. A sure sign of *crankhood* is the steadfast refusal to accept mathematical results. To this day we still run into [circle squarers](#). They're a dying breed and I find their insanity kind of cute. If only π was an [algebraic](#)

number there would be hope but fortunately it's [transcendental](#) and there isn't. Even the FSM, ([Flying Spaghetti Monster](#) — or God for you fundamentalists), cannot square the circle with a straight edge and compass; it's an absolute impossibility. Mathematical laws are not [girly men](#). They're tough enough for any neighborhood and won't back down even for deities.

Scientific laws also police themselves. You aren't going to build a perpetual motion machine, get colder than absolute zero, force mass faster than the speed of light or convince a stubborn coin that its past has any bearing on the next toss. Nature is a tough cop and she isn't going to take crap from anyone. Mathematical and scientific laws are called laws because you are forced to obey. Law and enforcement is symmetrical; you don't get one without the other.

When we enter the legal domain this symmetry breaks down. **Legislatures, parliaments and dictators can pass any law they want but unless they enforce it it's not a law; it's a suggestion.** Have you ever driven down the freeway at the speed limit and watched all the cars, even the ones driven by little old ladies, zip past you? Are all these drivers breaking the law? In some looney legal universe yes; in the real one they are *ignoring the suggested speed limit*. *Without cops there are no speeders!*

As a matter of personal policy I ignore all *legal* suggestions. I only obey enforced laws. Without parking tickets I would always park in the handicapped spots; they're more convenient. Without the IRS I wouldn't pay a dime of taxes. Without prisons I would steal with impunity. I'm not a bad person just an honest one. *Human legalities only become law when enforced.* Now Henry's health bill may contain verbiage forbidding payments for abortions and illegals but unless they're is a corresponding, rigorous and funded enforcement regime to insure that Henry's suggestions become laws he's just spouting bullshit.

[Lens Lust](#)

Posted: 22 Sep 2009 19:34:40

I suffer from a common and debilitating condition commonly referred to as NEM: **Not Enough Money!** NEM imposes all sorts of conditions and hardships on its victims. In my case NEM limits my lens lust. Without NEM I would have warehouses full of the finest cameras and lenses but as a lowly *NEMite* I am forced to choose wisely.

For months I have had my eye on the Nikon *f*1.8 35mm AFS DX prime. My logical reasons for lustng after this lens are:

1. I have a DX format Nikon AFS DSLR.
2. The FOV, (field of view), of standard 50mm lenses mounted on DX cameras is to narrow: 35mm is about right.
3. *f*3.5, the standard kit lens aperture, is simply not fast enough.
4. My *NEMly* budget is limited.
5. Modestly priced prime lenses often out perform far more expensive zooms.
6. I have had good results from prime lenses in the past.



AFS *f*1.8 35mm

I knew I wanted a lens like this even before Nikon started offering it. For the last three years legions of Nikon users have been waiting for modern, reasonably priced, AFS primes. During our long wait it seemed like every Nikon lens announcement was another chintzy *slow* starter zoom or a ridiculously overpriced fast zoom. When the global economy went in the tank *this* lens appeared. My first thought; they're offering something that people will actually buy in a recession.

After the *f*1.8 35 appeared buying one proved difficult. Remember those legions of Nikon users: lots of them wanted this lens. For months you couldn't find this item in stock anywhere. The other day I read that it was available at [B & H](#) so I hopped online and ordered instantly.

So how does it work?

It's apparent from the raw [NEF](#) files that it's sharper and renders straight lines better than the kit 18-55mm lens. The *f*1.8 also does something I have dearly missed. If you crank open the aperture you can produce a nice blurred background: [bokeh](#) baby!



Bluffton clown. Of course I am referring to the head of IT, [Kevin Synder](#), at Franklin Electric.

[My Olympic Spirit](#)

Posted: 03 Oct 2009 16:31:29

The US tax payer dodged a bullet yesterday (October 2, 2009). The [IOC](#), that cabal of corrupt whores, awarded the Olympics to Rio instead of Chicago. I've seen Rio, it's a beautiful city, and I pity the poor people there that will soon be paying out the [wazoo](#) for the dubious honor of enduring another installment of the world's largest publicly funded real estate orgy followed by a two week [drug enhanced](#) circus of the inane.



Christ the Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro

[Google Earth Image Touring](#)

Posted: 04 Oct 2009 12:00:08

In a scientific poll of one, (I sampled myself), [Google Earth](#) was voted the greatest free program on Earth. The brilliant developers at Google have managed to turn the most unlikely subject, *geography*, into a video game. And what a game it is! Google

Earth doesn't troll around in an adolescent make believe world. Google Earth serves up the real thing. This would be amazing enough but with Google Earth you can explore the Moon, Mars and the night sky as well. If you have any *geographic or astronomical needs* get Google Earth.

I got into Google Earth a few years ago when I started [geotagging](#) old pictures. Locating old, pre-GPS pictures, is one of the better Google Earth games. My mother snapped this picture of me in 1964. I am standing in front of the Uintah mountains in north eastern Utah.



Me near Redwash Utah

1964 was long before GPS was even a dream. To find *exactly* where I was standing I turned on Google Earth's terrain feature and slowly followed the adjacent road until all the landscape features matched up.

For famous sites it's not this hard. Here I am at Stonehenge. Stonehenge is a Google Earth *nobrainer*.



Me Stonehenge

Over the last few years I have geotagged hundreds of images. It's something I will continue to do until I drop dead. Online picture sites like [SmugMug](#) provide automatic

mapping of geotagged images but Google Earth does a much better job if you do a little [KML](#) programming. KML is an XML namespace used by Google Earth and Google Maps. It can be used to *tour* geotagged images. When KML files are compressed, (any ZIP utility will do), they are given a KMZ file extension. KMZ files can be loaded by Google Earth.

The attached KMZ file [geotagged.kmz](#) was generated by a [J script](#) I put together to query my geotagged SmugMug pictures. When loaded into Google Earth it spins around the world pausing to display all the pictures I have geotagged. I realize few will be interested in my pictures but it's not hard to extract the KML embedded in [geotagged.kmz](#) and adapt it to your pictures. Go forth and hack my friends.

Nobel Peace Prize Idol

Posted: 09 Oct 2009 17:03:39

My doubts about the Nobel Peace Prize started when Henry Kissinger and Le Duc Tho won during the Vietnam war. In my naive youth I thought a peace prize might have something to do with *peace!* I was so cute and unsophisticated in those days. As I aged I developed a robust sense of irony but when Yasser Arafat won the peace prize I was again dumbfounded. How could an outright unrepentant murderer qualify for a peace prize? Clearly my sense of the absurd needed work. I labored long and hard and when Jimmy Carter won for not being George Bush I took it in stride. Then Al Gore won for saving the Earth from global warming. Again my cynical detachment required tuning. What did global warming have to do with peace? Did I miss all the brutal carbon dioxide wars? Finally I understood. *The Nobel Peace Prize has nothing to do with Peace!* Of course I still foolishly harbored some illusions that you had to do stuff. This morning, upon learning that Barak Obama had won, I divested my final illusions about the peace prize. The Nobel Peace Prize is now worth less than a [Canadian Idol](#) win. At least some Canadian Idols can sing and dance.

F# Sirens are Seducing

Posted: 21 Oct 2009 20:18:03

For the last few days I have been playing around with an [early release of F#](#). F# looks like it might be a [.Net](#) language that I can stand! The alpha-geeks at Microsoft Research have convinced their corporate masters that the world needs a *functional*

programming language that can be compiled and executed as efficiently as traditional imperative and object oriented languages.

As a long time user of interpreted functional programming languages I can only say: *it's about freaking time!*

F# appeals to me for a number of reasons:

1. I am familiar with many of the concepts of functional programming. Coming from the [APL](#) world I have been using many of these ideas for decades.
2. F# can use .Net facilities. It can call, and be called, by any of the .Net languages. Lack of *deep supported* integration with host facilities has always hurt languages like J. You pretty much have to roll your own for everything.
3. F# can be compiled to virtual machine code just like C#. APL, J, K and others do not compile well. [Heroic attempts have been made to compile APL](#) and similar languages but sometimes heroes fail.
4. F# supports asynchronous and parallel programming. The typical computer these days has two, four, eight or more processors. In the very near future your grandmother's PC will have eight or more 64 bit processors and perhaps hundreds of gigabytes of *real*, (not virtual), memory. Programming such machines with conventional languages and tools will be, as one blogger noted, insanely complicated. F# may provide a means to focus the power of such machines without sweating blood.

I have ordered [Programming F#](#) and now I actually have something to look forward to in [Visual Studio 2010](#).

Counting Gods

Posted: 26 Oct 2009 16:28:33

How many fingers do you need to count gods? If you are like most people you simply assume the set of gods is enumerable and then you start fighting over which value in the set of positive integers $\mathbb{Z}_{\geq 0}$ or $0, 1, 2, 3, \dots$, is correct. This process is [elegantly explained by this flowchart](#).

I have a simple question. Is the set of gods enumerable? For all you *innumerates* out there a set is enumerable *if-and-only-if* its members can be counted. It's a rather

astonishing fact that many humdrum sets cannot be counted. Do you remember line segments \overline{AB} from school geometry?

The number of points in *any* nonzero length Euclidean line segment \overline{AB} cannot be counted. There are more points in \overline{AB} than there are counting numbers. If you don't believe me check out [Cantor's diagonal argument](#) and savor a classical mathematical treat.

Once you get your head around the idea that some things cannot be counted the notion of counting gods looks ludicrous. Why do you expect to tally your supreme beings with ordinary counting numbers when they cannot deal with line segments? Perhaps god counting requires more than positive integers!

Perhaps the bloody disputes between atheists $GodCount = 0$ and deists $GodCount > 0$ can be resolved with rational numbers \mathbb{Q} . How about fractional $1/2$ gods? Let's just split the difference and all get along. Unfortunately rational numbers will not satisfy *ultrapolytheists*, believers in more gods than you can count, because you [can count rational numbers](#). Ultrapolytheists need to get real \mathbb{R} – the numbers - anyway.

Counting gods is a complex problem. Electrical engineers cannot deal with the wiring in your fridge without complex numbers \mathbb{C} . Maybe a god count of $3 + 7i$ is the ticket

If this sounds silly, condescending and sarcastic congratulations your bullshit detector is working. However, ridiculous as this little diatribe is, [it is as sound as any mainstream religious doctrine](#). So if you find this absurd and, you have a fixed god count in your little head, who is really being silly?

Hard Ass Skeptic Rules

Posted: 29 Oct 2009 14:05:06

I am a hard ass skeptic. A hard ass skeptic is somebody that holds:

1. Ghosts do not exist
2. Gods do not exist
3. UFOs are not alien spaceships
4. There are no Yetis
5. There are no psychics
6. 9/11 was not an inside job

7. Life after death is nonsense
8. Reincarnation is more nonsense
9. Somebody called Christ did not rise from the grave
10. Mohammed did not ascend to heaven
11. The world will not end in 2012
12. Heaven and Hell do not exist
13. You cannot build a Good and Evil meter

Hard ass skeptics are often accused of being sour, bitter, judgmental *know-it-alls* by the usual crew of credulous buffoons. Cry me a river people! No matter how many idiotic ghost hunting shows you put on the history channel you are never going to convince a hard ass skeptic that ghosts exist. Just so we can all get along I am going to disclose how you can win an argument with a hard ass skeptic.

The key to marketing ideas to hard ass skeptics is to understand what hard ass skeptics consider valid arguments. Hard ass skeptics will consider only two types of arguments:

1. Mathematical proof
2. Hard science

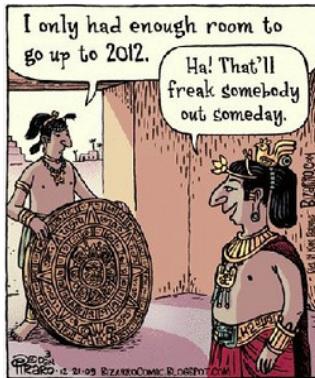
If you cannot couch your argument in these terms just shut the fuck up. You are wasting your breath and the hard ass skeptic's time.

I know this is harsh but it gets worse. Mathematicians and scientists make mistakes: lots and lots of mistakes. How does the hard ass skeptic deal with this *inconvenient truth*? The typical hard ass skeptic simply doesn't have enough time, skill or expertise to filter the rubbish from the rubies. ***So the hard ass skeptic assumes it's all crap until there is verified overwhelming evidence to the contrary.***

Finally, hard ass skeptics *put the burden of proof on a supposition's supporters*. It's not the hard ass skeptic's job to prove you are wrong. It's your job to prove, beyond any reasonable mathematical or scientific doubt, you are correct. So please stop whining about how we haven't proved that psychics, Yetis or Heaven do not exist. It's not our job and it never will be.

2012 Business Opportunity

Posted: 11 Nov 2009 18:23:00



Are you an [unscrupulous deranged crank](#) with the track record of a government budget forecaster? Do you have [no shame and assume everyone around you is an inbred moron](#)? Can you say one thing one day and the opposite the next and see no contradiction? Do you consider “evidence” [to be shit that you make up](#) whenever you feel like separating fools from their money? If you answered yes to any of these questions then you might have a bright future as a 2012 entrepreneur.

But you have to act fast. End of the World deals [only come around every few years](#). Seize the moment *or you may have to wait months* before the next opportunity to scam credulous dolts. My advice: strike while the iron is hot. After 2012 the only people making any money on 2012 will be [sour skeptics telling us I told you so](#) and we all know how much that pays.

Since we have no qualms our only problem is marketing. We have to find the right 2012 product. The field is getting crowded and we must exercise caution. 2012 entrepreneurs welcome competition like drugged out bike gangs welcome competition. With this in mind we have to rule out:

1. Movies: [2012](#) opens this weekend and if [the critics can be believed](#) we now have a viable substitute for water boarding and [Itsy, bitsy, teenie, weenie, yellow polka dot bikini](#) looping endlessly.
2. TV specials: The [History Channel](#) has locked up this market segment with one mind draining special after another. If I even see the number 2012 on the History Channel again I will climb up the nearest Mayan pyramid and cut my own heart out!

3. Survival gear: [What's a girl to wear when the world ends.](#) Get your end of the world gear now before the panic, or intelligence, sets in.
4. [T-Shirts:](#) Every disaster needs one.
5. [End of the World Party Catering:](#) Annihilation on an empty stomach is so 2011.
6. [Mayan Resort Holidays:](#) This one actually makes some sense. The prospect of heaping scorn on scores of new and old age nitwits on December 22, 2012 would warm my cold skeptical core.

Let's face it breaking into the 2012 market is hard. It takes an imaginative opportunistic whore to come up with a market worthy 2012 scam. I'm out of ideas; maybe you can do better.

[Let's Hang Congress](#)

Posted: 07 Dec 2009 19:34:01

As Mark Twain once rudely noted:

*It could probably be shown
by facts and figures that there is
no distinctly native American
criminal class except Congress.*

Regardless of your political or sexual orientation it's hard to disagree. The current Congress is the largest collection of brain-dead fuckwits since the previous Congress and no doubt the next Congress will be even worse. What's a bereaved citizen to do?



How about the simple obvious solution: *let's hang everyone in Congress!* It's simple, direct and effective. Left wingers will be delighted because a lot of right wingers will hang. Right wingers will be delighted because even more left wingers will hang. Independents will be thrilled because left and right wingers will hang.

Now I know what you are thinking, "If we hang Congress won't it be more difficult to find people to run for office?" I have to agree; hanging doesn't seem like much of

an incentive. We have to strike a balance between hanging and the grotesque perks of Congress.

Currently there are 535 members of Congress. Let's get a big jar of jelly beans and number the beans from 0 to 534.

```
0, 1, 2, 3, ..., 534
```

Then every year, instead of listening to boring State of the Union speeches, we hold a public drawing. Some lucky blindfolded child, (*because we are doing it for the children*), will reach in the jar and grab a bean. If the bean is numbered 0 we hang everyone in Congress. If another number comes up it's back to the trough for another year.

The [typical member of Congress serves about ten years](#): thank you Google. What are the chances the average member will swing? This is easy to *estimate*. Generate 10 random integers between 0 and 534 and see if 0 pops up. In the [J programming language](#):

```
? 10 $ 535
```

```
195 467 514 498 79 345 306 344 450 530
```

This lucky Congress critter survived. If we run this experiment ten million times we get:

```
100000000 %~ +/ 0 e.^0 1 ? 100000000 10 $ 535
```

```
0.0185448
```

or a 2% chance of hanging. Considering the prerogatives, pork, perks, and pensions of Congress a measly 2% chance of hanging seems about right. Most of the time it's business as usual and every now and then the public enjoys the spectacle of *terminal term limits*.

2010

Why Code when you can Steal

Posted: 28 Jan 2010 15:33:30

I am learning C#.

Two years ago I swore a blood oath not to learn anymore programming languages. It's been obvious for decades that you seldom find any *new and important ideas* in programming languages. What you typically find are old ideas renamed and wrapped in a new syntax. Virtually all [key concepts](#) in programming are [over twenty years](#) old and [many are far older](#). My disgust with new languages started with a single word: [refactoring!](#)

When I met refactoring it seduced me with its sleek geeky'ness. What could this wonderful word mean and what thrilling concept did it clothe? Well it basically means cleaning up your abhorrent code so that you can make some freaking sense of it! All competent programmers, dating back to [Ada Lovelace](#) (1815-1852), have been refactoring all their goddamn coding lives. *Refactoring is geek marketing: the same old shit in a glistening new package.*

C# is as free of new concepts as I expected but the language has its strengths. C# has managed to inherit most of its predecessors gifts without introducing untested features. C#'s designers restrained themselves and it shows. The language is clean, easy to learn, and integrates elegantly with .Net libraries.

This is all good but what makes it better is that you can steal tons of C# code. Google and Bing are my accomplices. When I want to find out what a [DataSet](#) does I just pop a query and dredge up nuggets like: [Creating A Data Set From Scratch in C#](#). In the old days you had to read dense language documents like the [J Dictionary](#) and think for yourself.

Thinking for yourself is so 20th century; why code when you can steal!

Command Line C# SmugMug API Metadata Download

Posted: 03 Feb 2010 21:26:51

I have a skeleton in my photographic closet! I enjoy hacking pictures as much as I enjoy shooting them. Before digital photography I got my jollies the old fashioned

way with *chemicals*: dark room chemicals. I still get all emotional when I *remember the scent of a fixer*. Ahhh — those were the days.

Now, instead of inhaling fumes in the dark, I hang out on picture sites: [SmugMug](#) is my current favorite. Over the last year I have uploaded thousands of carefully cataloged images: [you can view them here](#). I may not be much of a photographer but when it comes to image metadata my anal analytic side shines. I can [EXIF](#), [IPTC](#) and [GEOTAG](#) with the best of them.

Because I tweak metadata online, and I suffer from a *retentive* character flaw, it's only natural that I would seek to download my sacred metadata. This is what [SmugMug's API](#) is for! When I started experimenting with the SmugMug API I made the mistake of [reading the documentation](#). SmugMug documentation is, at best, a “work in progress.” It may help but probably not! I found trolling the web looking for [code examples](#) more productive.

To help the next SmugMug API geek I am posting a fragment of a simple command line C# metadata dump utility I put together. The core of the program is shown below and all the [C# source is available here](#). This program is to trivial to license so help yourself.

```
namespace SmugMugMDDumper
{
    class Program
    {
        private const string xmlHeader = @"<?xml version=""1.0"" encoding=""UTF-8""?>";

        // defaults - insert your own SmugMug apiKey, password, email here
        // defaults are used if corresponding command line arguments are missing
        private const string apiKey = "<YOUR SMUGMUG APIKEY>";
        private const string passWord = "<YOUR SMUGMUG PASSWORD>";
        private const string emailAddress = "<YOUR SMUGMUG EMAIL>";
        private const string outFile = @"c:\temp\smugmugdata.xml";

        static void Main(string[] args)
        {
            try
            {
                DataSet ds = new DataSet();
                XmlDocument doc = new XmlDocument();
                Arguments comline = new Arguments(args);
                SmugmugMetaData smugmd = new SmugmugMetaData();

                // parse and set any command line arguments
                if (comline["help"] != null)
                {
                    string __helpMsg = @"
Typical command line calls:
SmugMugMDDumper.exe -apikey:"yourkey" -email:"email" -password:"boo" -output:"c:\test\smugdata.xml"
SmugMugMDDumper.exe -output:"d:\mystuff\smuggy.xml"
";

```

```
SmugMugMDDumper.exe -password:""newpassword"" -output:""c:\temp\out.xml"""
SmugMugMDDumper.exe -help";

        Console.WriteLine(__helpMsg);
        return;
    }

    string __apiKey;
    if (comline["apikey"] != null) __apiKey = comline["apikey"];
    else __apiKey = apiKey;

    string __emailAddress;
    if (comline["email"] != null) __emailAddress = comline["email"];
    else __emailAddress = emailAddress;

    string __passWord;
    if (comline["password"] != null) __passWord = comline["password"];
    else __passWord = passWord;

    string __outputFile;
    if (comline["output"] != null) __outputFile = comline["output"];
    else __outputFile = outFile;

    // start output file - open SmugMug session - uses https
    smugmd.WriteLine(xmlHeader + "<SmugMugData>", __outputFile);
    string __sessionId = smugmd.StartSMSession(__apiKey, __emailAddress, __passWord);

    // collect all galleries
    ds = smugmd.GetGalleries(__sessionId, __apiKey, __outputFile);
    DataTable myTable = ds.Tables[0];
    DataRow myRow;

    // image metadata for each gallery
    smugmd.AppendToFile("<GalleryImages>", __outputFile);
    int rowcnt = myTable.Rows.Count;
    string rowstr = "/" + rowcnt.ToString() + "]: ";
    for (int i = 0; i < rowcnt; i++)
    {
        myRow = myTable.Rows[i];
        Console.WriteLine("gallery [" + (i + 1).ToString() + rowstr + (string)myRow["Title"]);
        doc = smugmd.GetGalleryImages(__sessionId, __apiKey, (int)myRow["id"], __outputFile);
    }
    smugmd.AppendToFile("</GalleryImages>", __outputFile);

    // complete output file - end SmugMug session
    smugmd.AppendToFile("</SmugMugData>", __outputFile);
    smugmd.EndSMSession(__sessionId, __apiKey);

    Console.WriteLine("[Complete] output file: " + __outputFile);
}
catch (Exception ex)
{
    Console.WriteLine("[Fail] SmugMug Metadata Dumper Failure - error message: " + ex.Message);
}
}
```

SmugMug Duplicate Image Hunting

Posted: 05 Feb 2010 18:07:45

One of the many things the developers of [Thumbsplus](#) got right was a proper [normalized database schema](#). When I first inspected the layout of a Thumbsplus database I knew I was in good hands. In Thumbsplus image files get unique keys and image galleries are simply lists of image keys. Images can appear in any number of galleries, without duplication, just the way the gods of database design intended.

Assigning unique keys and grouping by key lists is *so correct* that it was a shock to discover that [SmugMug](#), until recently, eschewed this principle. Prior to a recent upgrade if you wanted to display an image in more than one gallery you had to ... *shudder with horror* make copies! Whenever I made an image copy I felt like I was masturbating in an art museum.

This outrage is now fixed and you can place an image in as many galleries as you want without copying. Unfortunately there is a *residual* problem. How do you hunt down and exterminate all your bogus copies? In an acronym: [MD5](#). SmugMug assigns MD5's to all images. If two MD5's are the same there is an extremely high likelihood you are dealing with copies. So all you have to do is find images with identical MD5's and delete the extra copies. The following [J verb](#) uses image tables created from the XML captured by my [SmugMug metadata dumper](#) to do just this.

```
SmugDupsFrMD5=:3 : 0

NB.*SmugDupsFrMD5 v-- duplicate SmugMug images from MD5.
NB.
NB. monad: btct =. SmugDupsFrMD5 clDirectory
NB.
NB.   SmugDupsFrMD5 'c:\pd\docs\smugmug\data\' 

NB. read table files
path=.tslash y
albums=. readtd2 path,SMUGALBUMTABLE
images=. readtd2 path,SMUGIMAGETABLE
images=. }. images [ imhead=. 0 { images

NB. all duplicate MD5's
pos=. imhead i. <'MD5'
md5=. pos {"1 images
dup=. md5 #~ -. ~:md5
images=. (md5 e. dup)#images
```

```

images=. (/: pos {"1 images) { images

NB. remove images with matching smugmug pids
NB. these are proper virtual images and not copies
pos=. imhead i. <'PID'
pid=. pos {"1 images
dup=. pid #~ -. ~:pid
if. #images=. (-.pid e. dup)#images do.

    NB. retain selected columns and insert album names
    images=. (imhead i. ;:'FILENAME GID PID MDS ALBUMURL') {"1 images
    albums=. ((0 {"1 albums) i. 1 {"1 images){ 1 {"1 albums
    images=. albums (<a>;1)} images

    NB. group by MD5
    images=. (~:3 {"1 images) <;.1 images
    images=. >&. >@:(<"1@|:) &> images

    NB. order MD5 groups by galleries in groups
    NB. this results in a good order for editing
    NB. out the duplicates on SmugMug
    images=. (\:&.> 1 {"1 images) &.> images
    (\: 0 {&> 1 {"1 images){images
else.
    NB. no duplicates
    0 5$ ''
end.
)

```

More on SmugMug Duplicates

Posted: 11 Feb 2010 20:22:13

In my previous post I described a method for eliminating duplicate SmugMug images based on MD5's. This method does not get all the duplicates.

If you uploaded the same image to different galleries, at different times, the SmugMug MD5's may differ. I don't know what SmugMug rolls into their MD5 's but I suspect it's more than image data.

To get all the copies you must remove duplicate picture ids , file names and MD5's. Furthermore, to maintain a pure duplicate free state, you need to check these items often. Now, after uploading or rearranging pictures, I update my SmugMug metadata

and execute this [J verb](#) to insure I don't introduce duplicates.

```
CheckSmugDups=:3 : 0

NB.*CheckSmugDups v-- checks duplicate SmugMug images.
NB.
NB. monad: CheckSmugDups uuIgnore

'albums images'=. readsmugtables 0
images=. }. images [ imhead=. 0 { images

NB. images should be unique in three ways:
r=. ,: 'PID unique: ' ; # ~.(imhead i. <'PID') {"1 images
r=. r, 'MD5 unique: ' ; # ~.(imhead i. <'MD5') {"1 images
r=. r, 'FILENAME unique: ' ; # ~.(imhead i. <'FILENAME') {"1 images

if. 1 <# ~. ;{: "1 r do. smoutput 'duplicates present' end.
r
)
```

Setting Good SmugMug Key Words

Posted: 17 Feb 2010 19:57:50

Finding good key words is not easy. In many ways it is like creating a good book index. Decent book indexes are carefully constructed by [human readers](#) that understand what is being indexed and why certain terms *should be included*. Superior indexes showcase the gems and bury the garbage. There is a lot of mediocre software out there that purports to automate this task but I remain unimpressed. Machine indexing is like machine language translation: they both suffer from a lack of *real* understanding. I was reminded of how difficult indexing is while writing some code to update my [SmugMug](#) key words.

My first attempt at computing key words followed this recipe:

1. Run my little [C# SmugMug metadata dumper](#) to update image metadata.
2. Sift through the image metadata and extract all current key words.
3. Remove [common English words](#) from current key words.
4. Similarly, extract all image caption text and remove common English words.
5. Sort the remaining caption text key words by frequency.
6. Append the frequency sorted caption key words to corresponding current key words.

- Take at most seven words from the appended list as key words.

My thinking was high frequency *uncommon* English words would make good keys. This is generally the case but the removal of common English words from currently assigned keys was a big mistake.

I take care when naming image files. SmugMug picks up words in image file names and uses them as default key words. If you have good file names you will get useful keys automatically. Removing common English words from file names deleted words that were present for good reasons. For example: two common English words, “before” and “after,” are used in the file names of image restorations like this picture I took in Cyprus way back in 1968.



I think “before” and “after” are perfectly good keys for this image.

To avoid such problems I now leave file name words intact and augment these words with high frequency caption text words and print size keys like: 4x5, 4x6, 5x7 and 8x10. Print size keys is another story. You can view [my entire list of SmugMug keys here](#).

Assigning SmugMug Print Size Keys

Posted: 21 Feb 2010 21:56:27

I believe that a picture’s [aspect ratio](#), its *width* divided by its *height*, should be tuned to its contents. Consequently, I am not a slave to standard aspect ratios and print sizes like the ones shown in the following table.

Aspect Ratio (Short/Long)	Print Sizes (Inches)
0.5	4x8, 5x10, 8x16, 10x20
0.7	3.5x5, 7x10
0.666666667	4x6, 8x12, 10x15, 12x18
0.714285714	5x7
0.772727273	8.5x11

Over the years I have clipped and cropped my pictures producing a large number of *nonstandard* ratios. This is not a problem until I decide to order prints.

Pictures sites like [SmugMug](#) offer many standard sizes but they cannot accommodate every crank with an aspect to grind. To print a strangely shaped picture on SmugMug you have to open up the website's print selection tool and fit one side or your picture to a standard print size. This leaves part of the print blank and is often called the [letterbox](#) method. Letterboxing is not ideal but it gets the job done.

For standard print sizes there is a much better way. The following [J verb](#) takes the pixel dimensions of my images and computes standard, [300 DPI](#), print size keys like: 4x6, 5x7 and 8x10. After assigning print size keys you can select and print all standard sizes with a few mouse clicks.

```
smugprintsizes=:3 : 0

NB.*smugprintsizes v-- compute largest print size for given dpi.
NB.
NB. Computes the largest print size (relative to DPI x) for
NB. SmugMug images. Only images that have aspect ratios close to
NB. the ratios on (SMUGPRINTSIZES) are associated with a print
NB. size.
NB.
NB. monad: st=. smugprintsizes btclImages
NB.
NB. 'albums images'=. readsmugtables 0
NB. smugprintsizes images
NB.
NB. dyad: st=. iaDpi smugprintsizes btclImages
NB.
NB. 200 smugprintsizes images

SMUGPRINTDPI smugprintsizes y
:
nsym=. s:<'

NB. reduce image table on PID
images=. }. y [ imhead=. 0 { y
pidpos=. imhead i. <'PID'
if. 0=#images=. images #~ ~:pidpos {"1 images do. 0 2$nsym return.end.

NB. compute print sizes table
pst=. printsizetable SMUGPRINTSIZES

NB. image dimensions short x long
```

```

idims=. _1&.&> (imhead i. ;: 'WIDTH HEIGHT') {"1 images
'invalid image dimensions' assert -. _1 e. idims
idims=. (/:"1 idims) {"1 idims

NB. aspect ratio and print area (square inches)
ratios=. SMUGASPECTROUND round %/"1 idims
areas=. SMUGAREAROUND round (*/"1 idims) % *: x

NB. mask table selecting images with ratio
masks=. (SMUGASPECTROUND round ;0 {"1 pst) =/ ratios
if. -.1 e. ,masks do. 0 2$nsym return.end.

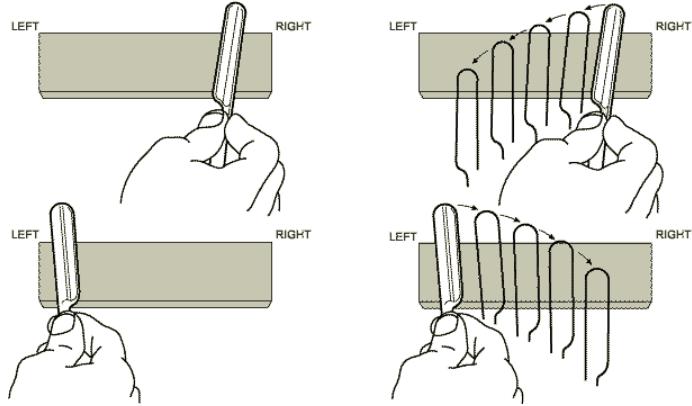
masks=. <"1 masks
pids=. s:&.> masks #&.> <pidpos {"1 images

NB. largest print area for selected images at current DPI
masks=. (1 {"1 pst) </&.> masks #&.> <areas
pids=. (<"1&.> masks "#1 &.> pids) -. L: 0 nsym
sizes=. <"0&.> 2 {"1 pst
; |:&.> ; pids ,: L: 0 (# L: 0 pids) # L: 0 sizes
)

```

Honing my Powers of Indifference

Posted: 11 Mar 2010 19:17:54



For years I thought it was rude to ignore people now I glory in it. In our overly social networked age it is vital to hone your powers of indifference. We cannot care about

everyone or everything and we shouldn't even try. Here are some people and issues I am ignoring.

1. **Gay Marriage:** Gay marriage is not a human rights issue. The real problem is a property issue. When gay dudes expire their partners frequently complain, (gay people complaining how novel), about how mean and nasty people are about settling estates and dividing up the booty. What the hell does this have to do with marriage? I am in favor of abolishing all tax and property distinctions between the married and unmarried and reinforcing property rights. It frosts my balls that unmarried wage earners subsidize married people with higher per capita taxes. It pisses me off that drag queens cannot leave their millions to their bum buddies without sleazy estate fights. **If your property rights are not protected your human rights are irrelevant.**
2. **Global warming:** Yeah, the world is slowly warming and it might be a problem by the middle of this century. Unfortunately by the middle of the century I am dead so, for me, global warming is like the increase in the **Sun's luminosity a billion years from now** or, even worse, **when all the stars go dark in a few hundred trillion years.** Fifty years, a billion years, a hundred trillion years it doesn't matter I am still dead. Next issue please.
3. **President Obama:** I had a bad feeling when I heard his **infamous oceans rolled back speech** during the Democratic convention. It was one of those spectacularly stupid remarks that forever stain one's reputation. Well after two years of campaigning and one year of inept governing it's official: nothing to learn here. My strategy now is to limit this administration's damage to *moi!* The rest of you can enjoy your hope and change.
4. **Creationists:** Life does not make sense without evolution just like mountain ranges and deep-sea trenches do not make sense without continental drift. Very few creationists rail against continental drift because we can see it happening. The **VLBI** radio telescope array is calibrated on a regular basis because the antennas are sitting on moving continental plates and the precise millimeter scale distance between them is always changing. The process of evolution is still up and running and will be long after **all creationist dipshits** are fossilized.
5. **Stock Tips and other Financial prognostications:** Investing your own money is a wonderful education in the fallibility of prophets. If it was so damn easy we would all be rich. I observe the contrary.
6. **CNN. MSNBC, FOX, ABC, NBC, CBC and BBC news:** Please just

[FOAD](#) and free up some valuable bandwidth. You are no longer relevant and are simply wasting our time.

Only Now at the End do you Understand

Posted: 16 Mar 2010 17:06:44



It's easy to see why other generations detest [boomers](#). Without a doubt this cohort, my cohort, is the most spoiled, self-indulgent, pompous and [delusional](#) generation in western history. We were born in boom times and grew up thinking they would last forever. Well, I am happy to report that nothing lasts forever. The boomers, now entering their twilight years, are about to come face to face with reality and reality is a mean [castrating bitch](#).

Boomers, the generation that fought no serious wars, (Vietnam doesn't count most boomers dodged that conflict with student deferments or outright draft dodging), suffered no serious economic downturns, swallowed [socialist drivel](#) about "doing only meaningful work" and seriously believed the government would look after them in their old age are now discovering that:

1. They have not saved enough.
2. Finding even [meaningless work](#) cannot be taken for granted.
3. The government takes more than it will ever give.
4. They will have to work until they drop or starve.

Boomers have nobody to blame but themselves. They enjoyed the highest incomes in history but instead of following the ancient maxim: *good times are when you get ready for bad times*. They binged on a diet of junk consumer goods, over [leveraged real estate](#) and various stock market Ponzi schemes. Well the bill has come due! Hope you enjoy your golden years of Wal-Mart greeting: [I'd urge you to apply now](#).

WordPress to L^AT_EX Hack

Posted: 12 Apr 2010 16:48:58

I have stumbled on another coding nuisance. Last weekend I spent a few moments exploring ways to export and print this blog in a nice typeset fashion. I first tried

[Blurb's](#) book making software. It has a nice feature that automatically downloads blog posts and formats them as ready to print books. Sounds great eh? Download your precious blog rants, press a few buttons, generate a slick PDF, upload it to a site like [Lulu](#) and then wait a few days for your blog to appear in hardcover. As usual the devil is in the details.

Blurb's book making software makes a mess of:

1. Any \LaTeX inclusions. All \LaTeX code is echoed verbatim as ASCII. I suppose we should be grateful that it's not deleted.
2. Source code listings are mangled beyond repair. Your elegantly formatted code comes out worse than HEX dumps.
3. Embedded images are improperly placed. When it comes to blogs restricting image inclusions to *simple center of the page layouts* pays big dividends. Wrapping text around images may *look ok on your blog* but RSS software like Google Reader will wreck it. Apparently simple center of the page layouts is too much for Blurb. The default layout stuffs square thumbnails in the margins: *arghhhhh.....*
4. Web Links are inserted as verbatim footnotes at the end of each posting. The link footnotes often sprawl onto extra pages that have only one or two lines. I can see why book publishers might not care about efficient page allocation (\$\$\$) but I certainly do.

After hitting all these shortcomings on my first test I abandoned Blurb and started searching for ways to export WordPress blogs as \LaTeX . There are a number of useful tools for converting \LaTeX to WordPress. Some of these tools are used by [Fields Medal](#) winners: see [Terence Tao's blog](#). Unfortunately going the other way does not appear to be well supported. Damn!

After failing to come up with an acceptable WordPress to \LaTeX freebie I downloaded this blog in WordPress's XML export format and took a look. To my surprise WordPress XML is what I call *good XML*. Good XML is designed to be read and understood by human beings! This contrasts with *bad XML*. Bad XML is essentially a binary format that some idiot decided should be rendered as XML. Bad XML is useful when you want to slow down computers.

Converting WordPress XML to \LaTeX looks simple enough to make a nice C# coding exercise. When I have hacked up a converter that panders to my idiosyncratic tastes I will post the source code.

Why I Still Use my Ten Year Old Garmin GPS

Posted: 22 Apr 2010 19:17:57



Garmin Etrex GPS

Last year I joined the swelling ranks of Smartphone users. My device belongs to the *BlackBerry* or BB clan. There are many things I like about the BB but my favorite feature is simply that my employer picks up the tab. Every month I get a corporate *guilt report* listing my BB charges and every month I tell myself there is no freaking way I would pay such bills with my own money. If I had to pay for the BB I would gladly toss it aside and revert to my normal uncommunicative self. I don't need to be

constantly in touch and frankly people who do are *sick puppies* that should be put down.

My favorite Smartphone apps are GPS driven online maps. I've always been a map freak. When I was child I taped *National Geographic* maps on my bedroom walls. In college, when my drug soaked classmates were decorating with rock band posters, I was framing maps of the *mid-Atlantic ridge* and the *real dark side of the Moon*. Even now, given a choice between *lame art* or antique maps, I prefer maps. Online maps and applications like *Google Earth* represent all that is good about civilization.

The same cannot be said for phone companies!

The BB has a built-in GPS receiver. When I first learned of this my heart was all-a-twitter. No longer would I have to carry around my ancient *Garmin Etrex*. Don't get me wrong I love my Etrex, My Etrex is a simple rock solid device that *functions as designed*. It has served me for a decade without complaints, upgrades or failures. It has never let me down! How many ten-year old computers are you still running? Much as I love my Etrex it's not what the cool kids are GPS'ing with these days. I was looking forward to putting Etrex out to stud — winning race horses have the best vertebrate retirement plans — and getting with the Smartphone program.

Then I learned that most Smartphones cannot function as *standalone* GPS units. To receive public GPS signals on a *Verizon* BB you need to be connected to the cell phone network and your application must be blessed by Verizon. What the fuck? Are you shitting me? Do you mean to tell me I have to pay a phone bill to access free GPS signals that I can still receive — *for free* — on my ten-year old Etrex. This heinous and vile rip-off ignites a firestorm of rage in my heart. Water-boarding is to humane for Verizon executives!

I will not be retiring my Etrex until all GPS enabled Smartphones can pick up, display and record GPS positions without being connected to phone networks.

The Reports of Library Death are Exaggerated

Posted: 15 May 2010 15:15:24

Not so long ago the pundits were predicting the Internet would kill public libraries. Boy were they wrong! Libraries have become the biggest and most successful Internet cafes around. I've been to *Internet enabled* public libraries all over the country and they are *extremely* busy. The downtown [Los Angeles library](#) has an entire room devoted to teens and it is always full!



Los Angeles Library Fountain

has a big computer room and the last time I was there it was overflowing with adults. I imagine a lot of them were looking for work. If you're broke and need to browse job sites head to the public library. The Internet has turned libraries into the coolest joints in town.

The Internet has also leveled the playing field between big and small city libraries. Bluffton Indiana is a dinky little town but it's [public library](#) is better than the [Nepean](#) or [Orleans](#) libraries in Ottawa: cities that are ten times Bluffton's size. The same holds for the Fort Wayne's public library. Fort Wayne is a small run down mid western city. If you drive around the place it doesn't impress you but go to the public library and check out the mathematics and history stacks. Mathematics is a good test of library quality. Public libraries seldom compete with University libraries when it comes to mathematics but the Fort Wayne library does surprisingly well. You find real honest to god mathematics tomes on its shelves. Its history stacks are first class and the biggest surprise; it's a [world-class genealogy library](#). It's rated number two

in the entire US for genealogy. Only the [obsessed Mormons](#) out in Salt Lake City have a better collection. After sampling Indiana's libraries I decided there was more to this state than corn fields and basketball.

[Everybody Abandon Facebook Day](#)

Posted: 21 May 2010 18:51:24

Yesterday was the first ever [Everybody Draw Mohammed Day](#). My favorite Everybody Draw Mohammed cartoon is shown below.

For the [troglodytes](#) among us Everybody Draw Mohammed Day was a sarcastic reaction to years of bullying, death threats and [fatwas](#) issued against cartoonists for the horrible crime of drawing caricatures of Mohammed. The point of Everybody Draw Mohammed Day was to drive home the simple fact that when it comes to free speech there are no sacred cows or prophets! Nothing is beyond *offensive satire*.

For me free speech is an absolute *inalienable* right that overrides nonsense like religious belief. If you attempt to regulate my speech I will resist. The harder you push the more I will push back. If you curtail or regulate my speech I will scream louder. If you pass laws restricting discourse I will break them. If you suppress my voice I will stop debating and start shooting. And, if you think I am bluffing go ahead and call me on it.

Given the depth of this conviction I was sorely disappointed to see that Facebook dropped The Everybody Draw Mohammed Day page. The cowardly weasels weren't even responding to official complaints. They just decided to self-censor themselves and a hundred thousand Facebook users as well. Of course they had their reasons but let's cut the crap. They have shown us that when cards are in play they have no core beliefs beyond pimping user data to third parties for cash.

I cannot endorse such behavior so I deleted my Facebook account. This was not an empty gesture for me. As a divorced father living in another country I enjoyed seeing Facebook posts from my kids on a regular basis but sometimes we have to give up things we like when they clash with principles.

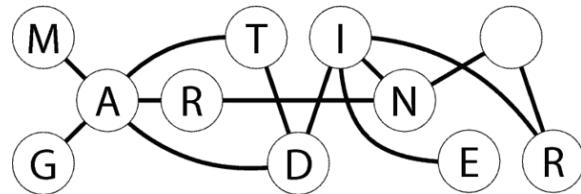


Da Glory-ass Koran

So I am inviting all that sincerely uphold free speech to join with me on June 5, 2010, (the day Facebook allegedly deletes my account), to celebrate **Everybody Abandon Facebook Day** by deleting your own Facebook account.

Oh Crap Martin Gardner has Died!

Posted: 24 May 2010 15:21:50



Martin Gardner

Last night I heard of [Martin Gardner's](#) death at the age of ninety-five. When someone lives into their nineties death is not unexpected but in Gardner's case it still saddens me. Martin Gardner's famous [Mathematical Games](#) column set a standard for mathematical exposition that has yet to be equaled. He proved, month after month for twenty-five years, that popular writing did not have to dumb things down to misleading trivialities but could, in fact, inspire, thrill and challenge specialists and children alike. There probably isn't a mathematician, physicist, computer scientist or engineer of my generation that didn't grow up reading Gardner's column.

When I was getting ready to teach mathematics as a [CUSO](#) volunteer in Ghana I decided to collect all of Martin Gardner's columns. During my school years Gardner's columns served as an antidote to [curriculum mathematics](#). Curriculum mathematics, in many public school systems, is horribly [ahistorical](#). There is no rhyme or reason why certain mathematical topics are covered and others, the vast majority, are ignored. Gardner's columns filled in the gaps and resurrected the beauty of even the dullest bits of curriculum mathematics. As a new mathematics teacher I couldn't think of a better resource so I wisely photocopied Gardner and ignored textbooks.

In Ghana I lived without TV, radio, recorded music and sometimes newspapers but I didn't care! On many nights I slowly read through my big pile of Mathematical Games photocopies. The effect of reading *all the columns* was striking. Taken one at a time Gardner's entries were always interesting but when read from start to finish you come away stunned by the level of erudition. Genius is an abused word. Our

silly media makes everyone a genius for 15 minutes. In Gardner's case the word is apt. I will miss the man.

Plug the Damn Hole

Posted: 26 May 2010 18:31:51

I see Obama's [awesome intellect](#) has been working overtime. I guess this is plan B after plan A was scuttled by a [raging homophobe](#). Forgive my "hickness" but if a homophobe could actually [plug the damn hole](#) I would gladly overlook some queer queasiness.



Click for gushy goodness

A C# .Net Class for calling J

Posted: 28 May 2010 14:48:18



One of my [favorite programming tools is J](#). In skilled hands *J is a spear in a world of bent spoons*. In my day job I rarely encounter programming problems that cannot be brutally dispatched with a few dozen lines of J. Most accomplished [J programmers](#) laud the [elegance and power of the language](#) and frequently remark on how learning J changed the way they think about programming. If you are intrigued please take a look but a word of caution. Learning J is like learning Calculus. Don't expect to progress beyond the trivial without a [substantial intellectual effort](#) on your behalf.

J has many strengths but current implementations also have some serious shortcomings.

1. J's GUI user interface tools are primitive compared to what you find in Microsoft Visual Studio or Java Eclipse environments.
2. It is difficult to use J in mixed language projects. J can make C style API calls and the Windows version sports a COM interface. Both of these call mechanisms are solid and work well but the C API struggles with many C++ libraries and COM is now considered a legacy technology in Microsoft .Net circles.

3. .Net executables can call J but J cannot *easily* call .Net executables.
4. There are very few useful J libraries. [Python](#) programmers often find complete solutions to their problems in libraries. With J you often end up writing your own libraries. This fosters an independent frame of mind at the expense of productivity.
5. Packaging J solutions is largely *ad hoc* and platform dependent. It's not like C# or Java where you get a nice self-contained install package.

To deal with J's deficiencies I cheat and use other languages and tools. This is getting the best of both worlds or [Miley Cyrus'ing it!](#) Miley Cyrus'ing in Windows environments leads straight to .Net and the premier .Net programming language C#. J is not a .Net language but J can be called from C# by COM or by C style API calls. This [JServer](#) class uses COM. JServer was inspired by Alex Rufon's [J Wiki essay](#) but differs in that all JServer calls are strongly typed. There is no point in using strongly typed languages like C# if you are constantly casting objects. Use the type checking Luke!

The following [JServerTest](#) code snippet shows JServer calls.

```

using System;
using System.Collections.Generic;
using System.Text;
using System.Data;
using JServerClass; // add reference to JServer.exe

namespace JServerTest
{
    class Program
    {
        static void Main(string[] args)
        {
            // create new j exe server - load only the j profile
            JServer js = new JServer(JServer.JScriptType.OnlyProfile);

            // make server visible/invisible/visible
            js.jShowServer = true;
            System.Threading.Thread.Sleep(200);
            js.jShowServer = false;
            System.Threading.Thread.Sleep(200);
            js.jShowServer = true;

            // do tests - create j nouns that interface can fetch

            js.jDo("18!:5 ''"); // should be in base locale

            // atoms - rank 0
            js.jDo("byteAtom=. 'A'");
            js.jDo("boolAtom=. 1");
        }
    }
}

```

```

js.jDo("intAtom=. 42");
js.jDo("doubleAtom=. 1x1"); // e in j notation

// arrays of rank 1 and 2 - higher rank arrays are not
// explicitly supported by the C# interface
js.jDo("boolArray=. ?50#2");
js.jDo("intArray=. 10 10$?100#10");
js.jDo("doubleArray=. 5 10$(?50#50) % ?50#50");
js.jDo("byteArray=. 20 30$'goaheadbyteme'");
js.jDo("stringArray=. .:'not by the hair of my chinny chin chin'");
js.jDo("stringArray2=. 11 7$stringArray");

// get tests - fetch j nouns - get and set are C# overloads

// rank 0 gets
byte byteAtom;
bool boolAtom;
js.jGet("byteAtom", out byteAtom);
js.jGet("boolAtom", out boolAtom);
int intAtom;
js.jGet("intAtom", out intAtom);
double doubleAtom;
js.jGet("doubleAtom", out doubleAtom);

// rank 1 and/or 2 gets
bool[] boolArray;
js.jGet("boolArray", out boolArray);
int[,] intArray;
js.jGet("intArray", out intArray);
double[,] doubleArray;
js.jGet("doubleArray", out doubleArray);
byte[,] byteArray;
js.jGet("byteArray", out byteArray);
string[] stringArray;
js.jGet("stringArray", out stringArray);
string[,] stringArray2;
js.jGet("stringArray2", out stringArray2);

// set tests - set copies of fetched nouns in j and test
js.jSet("byteAtomC", byteAtom);
js.jDo("byteAtom -: byteAtomC"); // should be identical - result 1
js.jSet("boolAtomC", boolAtom);
js.jDo("boolAtomC -: boolAtomC");
js.jSet("intAtomC", intAtom);
js.jDo("intAtomC -: intAtom");
js.jSet("doubleAtomC", doubleAtom);
js.jDo("doubleAtomC -: doubleAtom");

js.jSet("boolArrayC", boolArray);
js.jDo("boolArrayC -: boolArray");
js.jSet("intArrayC", intArray);
js.jDo("intArrayC -: intArray");
js.jSet("doubleArrayC", doubleArray);
js.jDo("doubleArrayC -: doubleArray");
js.jSet("byteArrayC", byteArray);
js.jDo("byteArrayC -: byteArray");
js.jSet("stringArrayC", stringArray);

```

```
js.jDo("stringArrayC :- stringArray");

// no overload for this case - it's not
// as important as the rank 1 case
//js.jSet("stringArray2C", stringArray2);

// Datatable's are supported by the interface
// as they can be quickly displayed and manipulated
// in DataGridView objects
DataTable dt = new DataTable();
dt.Clear();

// generate test j datatable representation - the interface
// loads a support locale CSsrv that contains the necessary
// j verbs to support these representations
js.jDo("DTTEST=: testDataTable_CSsrv_ >?:?100 10");

// get the datatable
dt = js.jGet("DTTEST");

// set a copy of the datatable back in j and test equivalence
// slight differences in floating number character formats
// are reconciled with (testDataTableMatch)
js.jSet("DTTESTC", dt);
js.jDo("DTTESTC testDataTableMatch_CSsrv_ DTTEST");

// wait five seconds before shutting
// down so user can view the j exe server
System.Threading.Thread.Sleep(5000);
}

}

}
```

The Real Problem with Enterprise Software

Posted: 11 Jun 2010 14:36:00

Only the gifted analytic minds of IT management and know it all programmers have the intelligence work ethic and superb taste required to select enterprise software. Speaking as an ITite, (one who works in IT), I can report that we are so gifted, so far-seeing, so utterly and totally awesome in our views that only ignorant *tuggles*, (non technical types), would dare challenge our recommendations. Even better, the same plodding sleep deprived determination that we use to code computers into submission can be applied to human adversaries. We can wear you down with one technical objection after another until you finally give in and make the correct selection.

And what is the correct selection? ITites assert that the *correct solution is the one that always puts them in absolute control* of clueless tuggles that seem determined to have their own way *when we know their way is wrong wrong and wrong!* To paraphrase

the leading reptilian philosopher of our age: **control is key when talking about IT.**



Because control is key enterprise software must extend and consolidate ITite empires or it will be rejected. Rejections will take the form of complaints about, cost, performance, scalability, standards compliance, or my current favorite *uncloudable*: software that cannot run in [the cloud](#). Some of these arguments may have merits but usually the selection boils down to human prejudice and personal comfort zones.

There is one poisonous consequence of this madness that really pisses me off. To kowtow to IT control freaks enterprise software vendors have made heroic efforts to prevent people from using and mastering their software. We are used to downloading software and giving it a try. I challenge you to try this with [Cognos/IBM](#), [Microsoft BI](#), [Oracle/Hyperion](#) or, the worst of the lot, [SAP](#) software. Not only will you not be able to download useful free trial versions but in many cases you won't even be able to get your hands on manuals! How lovely: a complex suite of software that you have to pay to read about!

Enterprise software vendors are rightly horrified by the prospect of their wares turning into commodities. A commodity, in [business speak](#), is something that you cannot mark way the fuck up! Of course all this stuff is grossly overpriced with inane gouging support contracts piled on. Do not despair enterprise software vendors are piling wood on their own funeral pyres. They are creating perfect conditions for low-cost, or open source providers, to knock them off and party on their graves.

To help set the cremation fires ablaze I abide by following sacred consulting principle. ***Don't waste your time on systems that you cannot take with you.*** This is the real problem with enterprise software; you cannot take it anywhere!

I did not have sex with that Oil Spill!

Posted: 16 Jun 2010 18:55:00

I would like to thank BP for accidentally creating a [teachable moment](#) for our political class. Prior to the gulf cluster-fuck the [most ethical congress in history](#) did not know that [fluid dynamics](#) is one of the hardest of the hard sciences. But, after two months of heroic attempts to contain the spill with [blame games, bribes, threats, legislative](#)

initiatives and golf it's finally dawning on the powerful minds that rule us that fluids cannot be bought-off, community-organized, press-marginalized or change-the-channel ignored. Reality is such an unfair bitch.



Last night, sensing a disturbance in the zeitgeist, Obama subjected our nation to a rousing *I did not have sex with that oil spill speech*. The One's words soared but we, the little unworthy peons, were as unmoved as *oil soaked pelicans*. Even our *Obamabot* leg tingers failed to detect *executive command*.

I wish I could say I am disappointed but I wrote this government off a longtime ago. The stark fiscal, technical and rhetorical incompetence they display every day is no more surprising than sunshine. The oil spill is an infuriating accidental disaster but it's not the biggest spill confronting us. That would be our insane, reckless and entirely *man caused* deficit spending.

Let's do some arithmetic. Let's assume the unhinged moonbats turned reservoir engineers have pulled the correct gulf spill rate of 100,000 barrels/day out of their asses. Let's also assume an oil price of \$80 dollars/barrel. When you multiply everything together you find that

$$8000000 = 1e5 * 80$$

eight millions dollars of oil is spilling into the gulf every day. Sounds bad. Let's compare that to our government's fiscal spill. The deficit for this fiscal year is expected to approach **1.3 trillion dollars**. This works out to

$$3.56164384e9 = 1.3e12 \% 365$$

roughly 3.6 billion dollars/day or *445 times the gulf spill rate!* If I could plug only one damn hole I know which one I'd choose!

My Tag Wordle

Posted: 24 Jun 2010 20:23:29

I plugged my [Delicious](#) ID into [Wordle](#) and it made this picture of my popular tags. It's a pretty accurate summary of what I've been thinking about for the last few months. *We're all more predictable than we think!*



My current tag Wordle

G20 fails to end G20

Posted: 29 Jun 2010 19:20:30



Last weekend I passed through Toronto. The city was bracing for the [over priced](#) and [utterly pointless G20 dog and pony show](#). The G20 circus did not disappoint. On cue the usual crew of [recreational anarchists](#) left their parents basements long enough to engage the police, set cars on fire and smash store windows. The police responded by arresting hundreds of protestors and holding them *for hours in horrific detention facilities that [did not offer vegan food!](#)* Hey, it's Canada, a gluten-free diet is probably enshrined somewhere in the [Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#).

Mirroring the idiocy in the streets the G20 leaders wasted tax dollars in grand style by [literally phoning one in for the children](#). They also muttered something about [reducing government debt](#) and doing a better job of pretending to be fiscally sane. Hey G20! I have a suggestion for that debt reduction thing — how about no more G20 meetings! Video conferencing software does a pretty good job; give it a try!

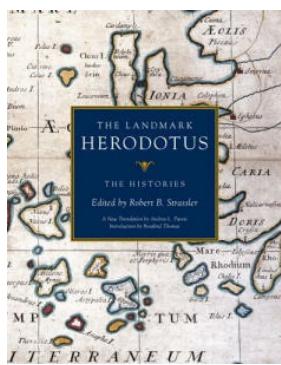
Given the pitiful track record and high costs of the G20 one wonders why any sane country would host such a boondoggle. Nothing of importance is ever achieved at these photo-ops and if something worthwhile accidentally emerges it will be [ignored or sabotaged](#). I know it's good for our rulers to get out and meet with their peers: [all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy](#). Still it's hard, in ostensibly democratic countries like Canada, to sell the public on the awesome benefits of hosting the G20. *Do you remember how the Canadian public refused to fund the G20 when asked in the*

pre-conference referendum? Oops sorry, I was thinking of how things should work! Nobody ever asks the public if they want to pay because the answer would be a resounding no.

The G20 is coveted, courted and consummated for exactly the same reason that more expensive boondoggles like the Olympics and the World Cup are: it's a great opportunity to punt public funds to your friends.

This Herodotus is a Hoot!

Posted: 11 Jul 2010 15:00:09



Yesterday, while driving to the mall with my wife, I launched into a lecture on why the iPad and its Kindle'ly kindred will never replace books. As you are reading this on a 21st century blog you can infer that I am not a technophobic Luddite. Devices like the Kindle are another way to read and for many purposes, (textbooks anyone), such gadgets will be better than traditional books. But, *and this is one big butt-ugly but*, when it comes to the book as a *objet d'art* the iPad is to a book like a bumper sticker is to the Sistine Chapel.

If you don't see this I feel sorry for you; you have never read a *real* book. It's not your fault, publishing, like everything in this sad sorry world, is subject to [Sturgeon's Law](#): "Ninety percent of everything is crap!" Most of the books you find on the shelves of big-box book stores are essentially paper turds — the more current the topic, the more *Oprah'ey* the content, the greater the likelihood of [turdhood](#). Paper turds can be great books. In fact there is a thriving niche industry that specializes in reissuing great classics as low-cost paper turds. Here *the medium is definitely not the message*.

Most of the time we are drowning in a sea of paper turds but every now and then a book appears that literally restores your faith in mankind: *The Landmark Herodotus* is such a book. The instant I opened the cover I knew I was dealing with something special. Book design is a subtle art, when executed at the highest level on the best source material it can produce jaw-dropping results. The design of The Landmark Herodotus is simply the best annotation scheme I have ever seen. Somehow the editors have managed to include thousands of marginal notes, footnotes and elegant place maps that simultaneously elucidate the original *and stay out-of-the-way*. I was completely taken by the end of the front matter.

My reactions are hardly unique. [Panagiotis Polichronakis](#) wrote in his [we are not worthy](#) review:

It's a rude thing, the march of history. It disabuses us, and we must gracefully acquiesce. Every single aspect of The Landmark Herodotus – most certainly including the translation at the heart of it – is superior to anything else that's ever been produced on behalf of the author.

So this is not only a good translation — it's the best ever! For a book that has been in circulation for over 2,400 years that's a pretty extravagant claim but it's probably true.

Last night I was sucked into Herodotus and managed to pull myself away at 3:00 am after reading the story of Cyrus the Great. Cyrus's story offers up a tasty morsel. Astyages, Cyrus's grandfather, dreamed of a vine growing from his daughter's genitals that grew to cover all of Asia. Now that's a bush! Alarmed Astyages told his Magi about his dream and they told him that he would be deposed by a grandchild: like duh! Being the kingly king he was Astyages resolved to off any of his daughter's offspring. In time Mandane, Astyages daughter, bore a son named Cyrus. Astyages charged his right hand man Harpagos with the task of terminating Cyrus. Harpagos wanted to obey his king but he [wussed out](#) when he saw Cyrus's cute little innocent baby eyes. He couldn't kill Cyrus so he did what all government bureaucrats do when faced with a tough choice: he delegated. Harpagos gave Cyrus to the herdsman Mitradates and told him to expose the child and bring back the body so he could be sure the kid was kaput. Mitradates knew he was [Median](#) toast if he didn't obey. He took Cyrus home to his pregnant wife and told her we are so screwed if we don't kill Cyrus. Fortunately for Mitradates, his wife and Cyrus she had given birth while Mitradates was away. Unfortunately, *for her baby*, it was a stillborn. Mitradates's wife suggested swapping her stillborn with baby Cyrus and raising Cyrus as their own son. In this way Cyrus survived and grew up as the son of herdsman.

Despite this clever ruse Astyages eventually learned the truth about Cyrus and how his trusted man Harpagos had disobeyed him. But Astyages was cool about being betrayed. He forgave Harpagos and remarked that Cyrus, *being alive and all*, would need some playmates. Astyages then told Harpagos why don't you go home and tell your own boy to come over and keep Cyrus company. He also invited Harpagos to dinner. When Harpagos's son arrived Astyages had him killed, chopped up and boiled. When Harpagos arrived for dinner Astyages served him chunks of his own son. Harpagos gulped his meat down. Astyages asked Harpagos if the meat was to his liking and added that if wanted more just look in this pot. Harpagos looked in the

pot and saw the boiled head, hands and feet of his son.

Stop me if you have heard this family diner story before. Shakespeare severed up a version in [Titus Andronicus](#), South Park took a stab at it with [Scott Tenorman Must Die](#) and Jeffery Dahmer seems to have confused this story with a recipe but, no matter how you like your history served, *The Landmark Herodotus is a magnificent hooting feast of a book*.

The 20 seconds that ruined Inception

Posted: 28 Jul 2010 18:24:00



Last week I saw [Inception](#) with my daughter. I was seriously considering giving this flick a miss after reading [Michelle Malkin's](#) rant about its empty-headed actors. Nothing ruins a movie faster than an actor going off-script! Actors are given scripts **written by others** for very good reasons. Most of them have **stunted childlike minds** that rarely emit ideas worth considering. I have no patience for such nonsense and I certainly won't pay for it. Lucky for Inception its Cineplex competitors were defining a new standard of [airbending suckitude](#) — move over [Plan 9](#) there's a new fetid [pant load](#) in town.

To my relief the juvenile politics of Inception's actors did not manifest in the movie. Inception is a fine film but it threw away its *slim* chance at greatness in the last twenty seconds. At this point I must issue an all points spoiler alert. **Do not read beyond this paragraph if you want to preserve your faint chance of being surprised.**



Inception is all about the recursive nature of reality and dreams. What is a dream and what is reality? How does dream time relate to real-time? Does such a question even make sense? Are we in a dream? What happens if we dream in a dream? The movie tackles these themes with technical gusto. The special effects are *so special* you forget about being impressed and just enjoy the story. On this account Inception succeeds where [Avatar](#) sounded some sour notes. You cannot fault this movie

on technical grounds. Nor can you fault it on cheesy subject matter. How many Hollywood blockbusters deal with the nature of reality?

To avoid getting lost in dreams the Inception dreamers carried a personal test token. The test token is a small object that *behaves one way in dream worlds and another way in reality*. And, *this is crucial to Inception's plot*, only one dreamer should know the token's trick. [DiCaprio's](#) character used the spinning top shown above. As some readers have pointed out the spinning top is DiCaprio's wife's token but *he knows* that in dreams the top never stops spinning while in the real world it tips over. By spinning the top he can distinguish dreams from reality.

In the last twenty seconds of Inception DiCaprio's character returns home and starts the top spinning on a table. Throughout the film he has been trying to catch glimpses of his children's faces. In his dreams their faces are always turned away. Finally, they turn their heads and he sees their faces. Then the camera cuts to the spinning token. It's still spinning but it's wobbling and starting to fall.

The film ends before the token falls. I'm guessing the director just couldn't stomach the *focus group happy ending* and spared us the indignity of watching the top fall. Despite the residual uncertainty, *maybe it doesn't fall and this isn't reality but another dream*, the implication is clear enough we are safe and sound and back in the real world. A better ending would have been no top wobbling and no child faces. Then everything would have been marvelously ambiguous and unclear. **Never pander to the audience art is to delicate for that!**

How's that for Inception?

Posted: 29 Jul 2010 15:38:57

This is perfect!



For more of these little nuggets check out [Proof](#).

The Kindle is just like the KKK

Posted: 04 Aug 2010 17:37:00

Oh Mohammed in a brothel how much more of this idiocy can we endure? A certain brain-damaged official, ([Thomas Perez](#)), in the US Department of Justice apparently

thinks allowing Universities to experiment with [delivering textbooks via the Kindle violates the civil rights of the blind](#). This so is mind-boggling stupid that I thought it was a bad joke. Well it is a joke and it's on us! We are entering the final stages of [Pournellian Iron Law](#) paralysis in the United States. Remember a vote for any Democrat anywhere is a vote for submission to morons like Perez.

C. K. Raju: Genius or Crank (Part 1)

Posted: 12 Aug 2010 19:21:14

Lately I have been amusing myself by working through [Euclid's Elements](#). Despite studying mathematics in university, teaching it in high school and *occasionally* using it in my software-soaked day job I never got around to reading Euclid.

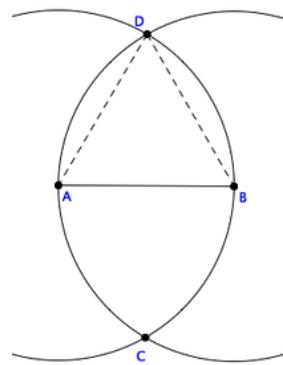
Euclid is routinely lionized as the wellspring of axiomatic mathematics. Before *The Elements* mathematicians were *clearly* out of control! They were running around developing useful methods, (counting, fractions, roots), and – *gasp* – *making unjustified assertions!*

Fortunately, *The Elements* put an end to all that and ushered in the endless age of rigorous axiomatic mathematics. I admire mathematical rigor but my tiny brain can only take so much of it before an all-pervading fog of befuddlement sets in. When I'm all fogged up there are only a few options:

1. Reread and rework until the fog clears.
2. Press on and review later.
3. Give up and abase self.
4. Take a break.

I'm a lazy [S.O.B.](#) so option (4), take a break, comes up more often than it should. One of my favorite ways to break away from mathematics is to read about its *long* history. While tracing the history of *The Elements* I came across the writings of [C. K. Raju](#).

C. K. Raju has written a fascinating book: (the) [Cultural Foundations of Mathematics](#):



Euclid's first proposition

The Nature of Mathematical Proof and the Transmission of the Calculus from India to Europe in the 16th c. CE. Raju's book is a bit hard to get your hands on. It's not on Amazon but you can use [World Cat](#) to find a copy near you.

Raju's thesis consist of these major points:

1. Significant portions of the *calculus* developed in India long before [Newton](#) and [Leibniz](#) and Indian methods, particularly series expansions, came into Europe via 16th century Jesuit missionaries.
2. European notions of rigorous mathematical proof evolved from the needs of the Catholic Church to convert Muslims with *impressive* iron-clad logical arguments. The old [baffle them with bullshit](#) tactic. Raju claims this *theological* attitude worked it's way into mathematics and resulted in the *bizarre western view* that deduction is superior to observation, experience and induction.
3. The ultimate source of eastern secular knowledge, (mostly Arab and Indian), was systematically suppressed and “Hellenized” by the Catholic Church. The church claimed all the “good stuff” in Arab texts originated with the ancient Greeks and had been *merely preserved by Arab copycats*. It just wouldn't do to credit hated, (remember the crusades), enemies for their good ideas.
4. Insisting on rigorous proof when teaching mathematics, especially to children, is sterile and stupid.

All of this reads like a mathematical [Dan Brown](#) novel and oddly the Catholic Church is once again the villain. I was enjoying Raju's account until this passage about [Kepler](#):

Why, after all, was [Tycho](#) so secretive about his papers, not even allowing his trusted assistant Kepler to see them? In any case, on Tycho's sudden death, Kepler obtained not just Tycho's observations but also the rest of his papers which contained the underlying theory. Being inclined towards heliocentrism, Kepler transformed [Nilakantha's](#) “Tychonic” orbits to a heliocentric frame (a simple transformation). This made Nilakantha's variable epicycles come out as ellipses. Being a professional astrologer, Kepler was good at making up stories, and he made up the story about how he had arrived at his results using Tycho's data.

In other words Kepler is a fraud and he ripped off one of the major discoveries in astronomy, the elliptical orbits of planets, from Indian astronomers. It's one thing to spin plausible stories about how parts of calculus may have seeped into Europe from

unacknowledged sources it's another thing to posthumously accuse someone of fraud. What would it take to make Raju's case? *How about some hard evidence!* What about Tycho's secret papers, do any of these documents survive and do they contain references to Nilakantha? Now that would be a smoking gun. Of course we don't know of any such papers *but that doesn't mean they didn't exist.* Proof by conspiracy is a very powerful inference rule — [9/11 troofers](#) and [ufologists](#) swear by it! What about the claim that the transformation from Nilakantha's variable epicycle **Earth centered system** to a **Sun centered** elliptical orbit system is "a simple transformation." I rather doubt it's as simple as claimed and even if the transformation was, to use the most abused word in mathematics — *trivial*, it still misses the point. The major shift was to abandon all pretense of **Earth centered systems** no matter how mathematically sophisticated! Before Kepler astronomers and mathematicians, in many cultures, toyed with the idea that planets orbit the sun. After Kepler everyone had to grow up. Planets do orbit the sun deal with it!

And it was precisely how Newton dealt with it that made calculus something worth fighting over. Newton's unprecedented and monumental proof that elliptical orbits are a mathematical consequence of the inverse square law of gravity is the dividing line between modern and early science. Nothing like it had ever been done before and even today physics and mathematics students are given to chanting [we are not worthy](#) when presented with this brilliant argument. Without Newton's use of the calculus nobody but a few anal mathematicians would give a rat's ass about who invented calculus.

In a later post I will argue that Raju discounts the importance of independent and coequal mathematical discovery in his account.

Binge Pretend Boink

Posted: 16 Aug 2010 18:19:13

The best line in [Eat Pray Love](#) comes early on. When Liz Gilbert's, (Julia Roberts), marriage is falling apart she gets down on her knees and gives prayer a try. Now Liz, a successful author and full-fledged member of the secular New York literati, realizes this is a bit phony so she considers starting her prayer with, "Hello God, I'm a big fan of your work." I'm a big fan of Julia Robert's work but *Eat Pray Love* makes impossible chick flick demands.

The modern chick flick is a difficult genre. A good chick flick:



Eat Pray Love

1. Caters to women without alienating men.
2. Treats *important but not serious* themes.
3. Is funny in a harmless inoffensive way.
4. Offers up current female fantasies of the ideal man.
5. Pushes soft feminist politics.
6. Goes easy on the [ball crushing](#) man hatred.

Eat Pray Love methodically tackles all these points; the film is earnest to a fault! Yet two hours after seeing it you are left with Julia Robert's wonderful smile and a nagging sense that hubris laden narcissists have picked your pockets — *again!* In this way *Eat Pray Love* is the perfect Obama era chick flick. *Not recommended for people with something better to do!*

Resume blues partly alleviated by [LATEX](#)

Posted: 28 Aug 2010 16:26:06

Once again your fearless correspondent is seeking new consulting opportunities. One of the major drawbacks of consulting is the constant need to keep marketing yourself! When it comes to self promotion that old standby, the resume, is still one of your most effective tools. When communicating with potential clients their first question is; “Can you send me a resume?”

Resumes are a black art. There are many, mostly bogus, theories about what constitutes a good resume and an entire cottage industry has sprung up to support resume creation. I am sure you have walked down the *power resume aisle* in your local big-box bookstore marveling at how people can write entire books on composing three page resumes. Maybe you have suffered through a corporate *out-placing* where well dressed *human-resource* types will earnestly criticize your use of bullets and personal pronouns. Whenever people go on about resumes I always think of Monty Python’s theory of Brontosaurususes.



Click for Brontosaurus theory

Here's the nasty truth: a resume is an advertisement! Do you honestly think anyone would dare to propose a *theory of advertisements*? A good ad gets noticed and helps sell the product. The same holds for resumes.

I have a simple resume style that has worked well. The only complaints I get relate to *file types*. Some clients want plain text, some want Word documents, others want PDFs and most don't care!

Lately I revised the [L^AT_EX](#) version of my resume. L^AT_EX is my preferred document format. L^AT_EX source documents are simple text files. You can manipulate them with any text editor on any computer system. Hence L^AT_EX documents cannot be held hostage by software vendors that *encode your words* in version specific binary formats. If you have ever converted a Word document to an old or new format you will know of what I speak. Because L^AT_EX files are simple text it's easy to share L^AT_EX on the web. My current resume borrowed from a number of authors. When I borrow I try to give back. The following links point to the L^AT_EX source of my resume and the final PDF output. Help yourself but be courteous and maintain the [creative common license](#) block in the LaTeX code.

- [cvh2010pub.zip](#) zipped resume L^AT_EX source
- [cvh2010pub.pdf](#) final typeset resume

The Return of APL Fingers

Posted: 12 Nov 2010 03:34:29

I am programming in [APL](#) again after a six-year hiatus. My APL fingers are rusty but it's amazing how deep muscle memory goes. I still know where all the beautiful APL glyphs' hide on standard keyboards. I've programmed in almost a dozen programming languages but I maintain warm feelings for APL because I lost my [coding virginity](#) to her.



APL type ball (1970s)

APL was gentle: abstract, clean, austere and so intoxicatingly elegant. I loved [Iverson notation](#) and how it manifested in what remains the most beautiful symbol set ever devised for a programming language. Blinded by passion I overlooked APL's faults but as my ardor cooled I took notice of one glaring APL problem that persists to this day. *Displaying, printing, emailing and now blogging with APL is a pain!* Much has improved with the steady adoption of Unicode but even today handling APL imposes burdens. For example, without the [APL385 Unicode](#) font your browser will mangle the following APL characters.

! * + - / < = > ? \ ^ | ~ ``- x ÷ ← → ↓ Δ ∇ ∈ o v u : ~ ≠ ≡ ≦ ≧ c c θ t - t t o j l
I [] [] [] φ / - x [] [] q [] [] t [] [] Δ [] [] R [] [] t [] [] v [] [] o [] [] - , ~ [] [] θ [] [] v [] [] l [] [] r [] [] w [] [] e [] [] i [] [] a [] [] o [] []

By the way, if you have not installed APL385 Unicode I highly recommend down-loading and installing it. You can get APL385 at [Vector](#). *Regrettably installing a Unicode APL font will not fix all your APL character problems!* In particular you cannot *reliably*:

1. Copy and paste APL code between APL vendors or between APL and other languages.
 2. Typeset APL listings with ubiquitous L^AT_EX packages like [lstlisting](#).
 3. Post APL idioms on [Twitter](#). Twitter's 140 character limit is not such a big deal for APL.
 4. Print on arbitrary network printers! It's the 21st century yet office printers are routinely limited by parochial IT policies to a small set of standard fonts.

APL'ers almost relish these irritants after all problem solving is what APL'ers do! We don't go crying to momma; we squash whatever is annoying us and get on with deeper problems.

Currently I am dealing with how to display APL functions on WordPress. WordPress supports a source code highlighting plug-in based on Alex Gorbatchev's excellent

Javascript [SyntaxHighlighter](#). The WordPress plug-in produces wonderful results for well known languages like C# and by defining language specific Javascript classes you can highlight languages like APL. [Eric Lescasse](#) has done this for [APL+WIN](#) code so it is possible, (given Unicode APL fonts), to render highlighted web friendly APL code. Unfortunately WordPress does not support APL highlighting, (what a surprise), and has banned user Javascript classes on their freebie blogs. Apparently some programmers abuse JavaScript, (another surprise), and [uncontrolled](#) Javascript'ing might endanger the WordPress business model.

This leaves the users of peculiar programming languages with a problem. We can pester WordPress to support new languages or we can roll our own. I am starting a campaign to get APL and J on WordPress's list of highlighted languages and while I am waiting for official support I will roll my own. Fortunately, highlighting code for blogs is not difficult. The much maligned MS Word (2007 and beyond) can crank out blog happy APL provided you have [UTF-8](#) APL Unicode text to format. Getting UTF-8'ed APL is the tricky bit. Some APL systems like [Dyalog](#) directly support UTF-8 and others are planning to do so. APL+WIN cannot spit out UTF-8 but it's not difficult to transform APL+WIN to UTF-8. The [APL Wiki](#) contains some slick APL+WIN functions to convert internal APL text to and from UTF-8.

To get a sense of why all this fuss is worthwhile consider the following APL function taken from [Eugene McDonnell's](#) superb essay [Life: Nasty, Brutish, and Short](#).

```

∇ z ← LifeKnuth ω;v
  v ← ω
  ω ← ω + (1 ⋄ ω) + -1 ⋄ ω
  ω ← ω + (1 Θ ω) + -1 Θ ω
  ω ← ω + ω - v
  z ← ω ⍳ 5 6 7
∇

```

This little function is not the *shortest* APL Life function but in my opinion it's the clearest and most concise description of Life's generation rules out there. [Tool of thought](#) is not an empty APL marketing slogan. It's the real deal!

Soon we will all be Software Archaeologists

Posted: 06 Dec 2010 03:23:13

One of my pet peeves is the ridiculously short lifetimes of digital media. I remember

9 track mainframe tapes and 5.5 inch floppies: technologies that thrived in an ancient bygone epoch known as the [Eighties](#). Good luck trying to read 9 track tapes or 5.5 inch floppies today! You will have better luck with older [paper punch cards](#). Punch card readers are hard to find these days but *you can see the damn card holes with your own eyes!* In fact you don't even need eyes to read punch cards. I once knew a blind mainframe programmer that banged out massive [FORTRAN](#) programs by feeling the holes on punch cards. Try that with a USB flash drive.

Of course I appreciate that you can stuff the data from an entire filing cabinet of 5.5 inch floppies onto one modern USB flash drive but I am *disturbed* by the fact that all those gigabytes will soon be *more unreadable than cuneiform*. I am not the first to worry about our distressed digital data. [Kevin Kelly](#) considers the word "storage" a dangerous misnomer and advocates the use of "[movage](#)" instead. *You had better move your data from old to new formats or you will lose it!*



Rosetta Ball

Movage is one of the reasons I have not jumped on the *eReader* bandwagon. Replacing myriagrams of books with one lightweight tablet is appealing but **iPads and Kindles are not stable!** High quality [books have shelf lives measured in centuries](#). With digital media you're lucky to get through a decade. It's a good bet you won't be able to read what's on your *eReaders* in ten short years! You poor dumb suckers will have to repurchase your library just like you repurchased your record and movie collections. It's not in Amazon's or Apple's interest to worry too much about media durability.

Fortunately some people do worry about media stability. Check out [The Long Now's Rosetta project](#) for what I consider a stable medium.

To belabor this point, while I was unpacking boxes of old-fashioned books, (we recently moved again), I came across a notebook I put together for a poster I presented at the [1994 APL conference in Antwerp](#). My notebook contained a paper version, *still eminently readable*, and four 3.5 inch disks. My oldest computer has a vestigial 3.5 inch disk drive so I tried copying these sixteen year old disks. Some of the disks were unreadable, (surprise surprise), but I was able to recover a directory containing my poster's source. Some of these files were old Microsoft Word documents. Word 2007 could not read them! Even when bits survive changes in software can render them useless. Fortunately I loathed Word in 1994, a sentiment I still maintain, and wrote my poster in [L^AT_EX](#).

[L^AT_EX](#) source is dull ASCII text. Civilization will collapse before we lose the ability

to read it! Of course L^AT_EX, like Word, has changed since 1994 so, [just for the hell of it](#), I decided to compile this old document with [MikTeK 2.9](#). It didn't compile; I was missing some old graphics macros and a key style file. It didn't take me long to fix these problems. I replaced the graphics macros with standard `\includegraphics{}` commands and converted all the Windows `*.bmp` files to `*.png` files. Google even found the long-lost missing style file `qaaelba.sty` in `arxmliv`. After making these trivial changes `pdflatex.exe` gobbled my poster source and moved [Using FoxPro and DDE to Store J Words](#) into the 21st century.

A Black Swan Song

Posted: 19 Dec 2010 05:15:26



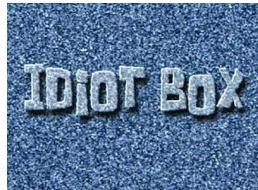
There's a lot to like in [The Black Swan](#). To begin, you simply cannot beat the soundtrack! [Tchaikovsky](#) delivers a bit stream worthy of high quality digital cinema sound systems. [Natalie Portman](#) gives the best performance of her career — now I see what the [young Darth Vader](#) and that [creepy V guy](#) saw in her! And, to cap it off, The Black Swan elegantly solves the “ballet guy problem.” Real guys don’t do, watch, or appreciate ballet but throw in some hot lesbian ballerina on ballerina action and suddenly you’re up for a skinny dip in [Swan Lake](#) just to cool down.

I was expecting a [euroweenie](#) art film but the Swan exceeded my expectations by being — what’s that word — *entertaining*. I particularly enjoyed being fooled until the last scene. There is nothing I hate more than figuring out what’s going on in a movie. I demand that lovely confused state of mind before all is revealed. And for the denouement, I expect coherence and logic. I was not disappointed. The Black Swan is a film ballet, [NASCAR](#) and psych patients can all enjoy for roughly the same reasons: enthusiastically endorsed.

2011

It's all over for Broadcast TV

Posted: 12 Jan 2011 06:21:21



Human beings are worthless [lumps of lazy protoplasm](#). We only change our bad habits when that bitch — *reality* — forces us to reconsider our wayward ways. In this respect the [great recession](#) has been a wonderful teacher. It's sat us down and made us stare at the books. And arithmetic, being what it is, has brought out the savage budget slasher in all of us.

The amount of money we were handing over to the cable company for the privilege of watching crap on TV could not be justified. We cut it off — no cable, no satellite, no HD, nada zip zilch! When annualized that's \$500 bucks. What the hell were we thinking? \$500 dollars wasted on TV. Thank you recession.

[OMG](#) no live TV - how do you survive? Being old farts we starting reading more but then one day, in the midst of acute [Family Guy](#) withdrawal, we tried streaming. It had been years since I last tried watching video on computers. Five years ago streaming video was more like [steaming pile](#) of video. I didn't expect things had improved but I was wrong. On high-speed internet connections streaming is now *good enough* to replace TV. For months we've been enjoying free streaming sites like [Hulu](#). I really enjoy some old, rarely seen, classic TV programs. Check out this [episode](#) of [Alfred Hitchcock Presents](#). It's a neat story with a probability lesson and a [hard ass skeptic](#) ending.

The UN Space Treaty is Holding Us Back!

Posted: 14 Jan 2011 21:55:24

2011 marks the [42](#)'nd anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon landing. 42 [idiot infested](#) years have passed since that glorious day and nothing that has happened since comes within a nautical league of matching it. My vile boomer generation has downplayed the significance of space exploration for decades. I remember getting a shrill lecture from my left leaning fifth grade teacher about what a waste of money the space program was. Being a self-assured child so I told my teacher he was preening unimaginative Neanderthal. This landed me in detention but I refused to apologize.



Apollo Earthrise

Manned space flight has been in a depressing, decades long, holding pattern. The real advances in space exploration have come exclusively from unmanned probes and robots. While astronauts have been going round and round in that orbiting boondoggle known as the International Space Station the [Voyagers](#) are on the brink of interstellar space, probes are on their way to [Pluto](#) and [Mercury](#), [Cassini](#) is orbiting Saturn, a small armada of [orbiters](#) and [crawlers](#) are exploring Mars, low-budget missions discovered [water on the moon](#), space telescopes like [Chandra](#), [Hubble](#) and [Spitzer](#) have shown us wonder after wonder and, capping it all off, [WMAP](#) determined the age of the entire frigging universe. Compare these awesome achievements to ISS astronauts [unplugging zero-G toilets](#).

Why has so little been accomplished? I can think of two good reasons.

1. Exclusive government control
2. The UN Space Treaty

Until recently only governments could afford space programs. In the early days of space exploration government control made sense but that era is [coming to an end](#). In a few decades private entities will be able to mount manned Mars expeditions and send robots anywhere in the solar system and beyond. The technology is coming along nicely but I am afraid the politics will soon be a gigantic millstone around our necks. The millstone takes the form of the [absurd UN Space Treaty](#).

The UN space treaty is another sorry artifact of the 1960's. It reads like a bunch of unwashed socialist hippies got together and decided to ban capitalism in space. There is no other way to explain ridiculous terms like:

1. *The exploration and use of outer space shall be carried out for the benefit and in the interests of all countries and shall be the province of all mankind.*
2. *Outer space is not subject to national appropriation by claim of sovereignty, by*



Green: UN Space Treaty nations

means of use or occupation, or by any other means.

3. *States shall be responsible for national space activities whether carried out by governmental or non-governmental activities.*
4. *States shall be liable for damage caused by their space objects.*
5. *States shall avoid harmful contamination of space and celestial bodies.*

Suppose some daring entrepreneur decides to mount an asteroid mining expedition. This is not as crazy as it sounds. Asteroids are relatively easy to get to and very easy to get off of. They also contain [mountains of valuable rare earths, platinum and gold](#). Eros alone holds well over [20 trillion dollars](#) of metals. You could pay off the US national debt by mining one dinky asteroid! One day, not very long from now, robot asteroid mining will make a compelling business case. To bad the UN Space Treaty outlaws it.

If you have to pay off all of mankind (#1, #2) your compelling business case evaporates. Environmentalists, (yeah space environmentalists), would complain that mining damages and contaminates a celestial body (#4, #5). Finally, even if the operation was 100% privately funded, various governments could legally ransom our daring entrepreneur or shut him down (#3). These tactics have already been tried. Remember the [hysteria that preceded the launch of Cassini](#). A pack of morons decided that the [Plutonium powered RTG](#) on Cassini posed a grave threat to all mankind and started citing [the UN Space Treaty in hopes of blocking the launch](#). Cassini was not a money-making operation so we ignored the loons. Asteroid mining will be another thing all together. Everyone will want their cut. With the UN in charge we're going to feel like the *probed* subjects in this Kids in Hall video.



Click for anal probing aliens

J 7.01 Now Playing in your Browser

Posted: 12 Feb 2011 22:01:31

Big changes are afoot for J programmers. With the release of [J 7.01 JSOFTWARE](#) has taken the risky step of [deprecating](#) two well established user IDE's and replacing them with brand new [GTK](#) and Web browser-based interfaces. As we all know new software is not necessarily better software, (remember that risky bit), but in this case the changes make sense.

```
J Http Server
load 'general/jod'
4 od **

1[jod c:/jod/701/jod/
joddev c:/jod/701/joddev/
utils c:/jod/701/utils/]

od ::*joddev jod utils*
1opened (rw/rw/rw) ->[joddev jod utils]

rs 'buildjodcompressed'
NB. System: JOD Author: John D. Baker Email: bakerjd99@gmail.com
NB. Version: 0.9.0 Build Number: 32 Date: 12 Feb 2011 17:50:59
compressing ...
output file locations:
c:/j701/addons/general/jod/jod.ijs
c:/jod/701/joddev/script/jod.ijs
jod.ijs c:/jod/701/joddev/alien/jod_0_9_0.zip
70466 script bytes
JOD compressed build complete
```

J 7.01 running JHS on Chrome

Early J systems were largely Windows-Centric. Yes, J has run perfectly well on strains of UNIX/Linux and the Mac for over a decade but I think it's fair to say that J IDE's were biased toward Windows. JSOFTWARE was well aware of this

and tried to offer the features of their Windows IDE with a portable Java based IDE. Unfortunately the Java IDE, like Java itself, failed to live up to expectations.

Now that the many, if not the majority of J programmers, run J on non-Windows, (mostly Linux and the Mac), systems it makes no sense to treat them like second class citizens. So how do you provide a *state of the art portable user IDE* that runs well on Windows, Linux, the Mac, smart phones and various [IGadgets](#). There is no single answer so JSOFTWARE wisely decided to offer two IDEs: JHS and [JGTK](#).

The JGTK IDE is a desktop application that is similar to the older Windows IDE. JGTK is somewhat biased toward Linux but this his doesn't mean it doesn't work well on other systems. I run it on WinXP and Win7 machines all the time. JGTK takes longer to load than the older Windows IDE but once it's up and running I don't see significant performance differences. The JGTK editor is superior to the older Windows editor and I love the side bar and UNIX style code tagging. For a first version JGTK is a nice bit of work that will only improve as J programmers and users pound away on it.

JGTK is nice but JHS is radical. JHS abandons the desktop and turns your favorite web browser into a stripped down J programming environment. I was skeptical when I first heard about JHS but it has won me over. JHS is amazingly effective under Google's Chrome browser. It comes up in a flash and is as zippy or faster than the older Windows IDE. Even better this webby goodness imposes minimal burdens. The JHS web server is often one of the smaller processes running on my machines. I have been doing the bulk of my [JOD](#) update work with JHS and I frequently forget I'm using a browser! *Good user interfaces, unlike politicians, get out of your face!*

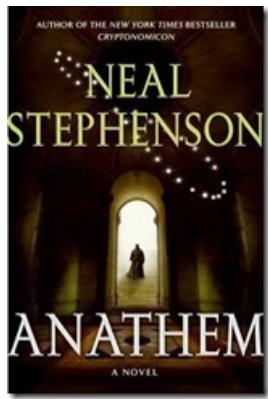
As for my [J addon JOD](#): J 7.01 introduced a number of system script changes that break JOD 0.8.0. I am working on JOD 0.9.0, (a beta version is available in the files box sidebar of this blog), that fixes these problems and implements some planned changes. The biggest change so far: I have moved the JOD interface out of the `z` locale into its own `ijod` interface locale. How's this for a marketing slogan? **JOD 0.9.x – now with less z stomping!**

[Anathem: Plato's Parallel World](#)

Posted: 21 Feb 2011 01:02:08

About the best thing anyone can do for you is to suggest a *good book*. When I was in my teens my aunt pointed me at Tolkien: a shrewd call. I was at the perfect age

for a romp in Middle Earth. In the 1990's a consulting client introduced me to [Neal Stephenson](#). I started with [Snow Crash](#) and Hiro Protagonist. How can you not love a character named Hiro Protagonist? I went on to [The Diamond Age](#), [Cryptonomicon](#), (Stephenson's best work), [The Baroque Cycle](#) and now [Anathem](#).



All authors get in ruts. Since Cryptonomicon Stephenson has been in a *books about very smart characters rut*. Fictional intelligent characters, particularly software types, scientists, mathematicians and so forth are often cut from the same cloth. This is why [The Big Bang Theory](#) works! This is not a literary flaw! Speaking as a bona fide software type I can assure you that smart tech types *are* alike. Logic drives capable minds down adjacent roads. The history of mathematics and science is littered with tales of brilliant individuals independently coming up with similar, if not identical, ideas. It's almost as if mathematical ideas exist *outside* the minds that *discover* them. This is one of the major themes of Anathem.

The world of Anathem is Arbre. Arbre is eerily similar to Earth. Arbre is Goldilocking around a Sun like star. It has a moon, large oceans, a “nitrogen oxygen” atmosphere and even enjoys plate tectonics. Plate tectonics is probably not that common for Earth sized rocky worlds. The Earth lucked out because a large chunk of the Earth’s crust is orbiting us in the form of the Moon. Venus wasn’t so lucky, or unlucky, depending on how you feel about [crust stripping planetary impacts](#). Arbre is also inhabited by “people” that could be our neighbors.

Arbre’s history seems a few thousand years longer than ours; they’ve repeatedly wreaked their planet with catastrophes like ethnic pogroms, global warming and nuclear war; things we’re only working on. Stephenson works his magic building up Arbre in our imaginations. The result is a solid real world. I applaud the authors achievement. Arbre, like Dune and Middle Earth, will stick with you.

There are big cultural differences between Arbre and Earth. On Arbre society divides into the Secular and Mathic worlds. Arbre’s secular world is familiar. It has brain-dead TV, (just like MSNBC), highways, gas stations, suburbs, tacky tourists, wacko religious cults and even big box stores — *they’re not called Arbre-Marts*. It’s the Mathic world that needs elaboration.

The Mathic world consists of a large number of walled, self isolated institutions called maths. The maths are populated by avout. A math is a cross between an Earth monastery, university and scientific society. Each math voluntarily cuts itself off from

the secular world on one, ten, hundred and thousand-year cycles. Our [preening public intellectuals](#) might see themselves as avout. They flatter themselves. The avout have all taken a vow of material poverty. They are allowed three possessions. There are no [tenured Mercedes driving poseurs](#) among the avout. Stephenson makes it clear that not all avout are intellectually gifted or suited for a life of the mind. Many of them become gardeners. If only our [second raters](#) did the same.

Stephenson devotes many pages to the details of mathic life. We learn about their rituals, clock winding is central, they're distinct philosophical orders, avout fashion trends, (challenging with only two articles of clothing), their diet and sex lives. By the time Stephenson is ready to release the avout you feel like you've been holed up in a math. I won't ruin Anathem by summarizing. Let's just say that a young Frau Erasmas and many of his friends and mentors will suddenly find themselves outside the gates of their math to deal with a historic emergency. After the avout leave the maths it's a great ride: very much in the mold of the Waterhouse's adventures in Cryptonomicon and The Baroque Cycle. Along the way Stephenson wows us with countless philosophical allusions and micro *in-plot* seminars. Remember, the at large avout are uniformly brilliant; they're not going to chat about reality TV. Imagine Plato as a Kung Fu star. Between ass-kickings the characters calmly entertain ideas like Plato's world of pure mathematical forms, (known as the Hylaeon Theoric World on Arbre), is an actual parallel quantum cosmos that somehow leaks information into receptive minds in "neighboring" cosmii. Somehow Stephenson makes these lectures riveting.

Anathem is excellent on many levels but one flaw bars it from the pantheon of great books. *The characters are insufficiently distinct.* You can tell them apart when absorbed by the novel but they quickly merge into each other. Smart tech types share many *correct* ideas but they do not share the same character. Read [Brighter than a Thousand Suns](#) there is no mistaking Oppenheimer for Bohr, or Fermi, or Von Neumann, or Teller. In the real world brilliance exaggerates character. Stephenson exploited this in Cyptonomicon and The Baroque Cycle by casting the very real Turing, Newton and Leibniz as characters. Anathem is not a Dickens novel. There are no Scrooge's, Pip's, or Miss Havisham's, characters that live outside their novels, running around. I fear that it is not even an Ayn Rand novel. [Altas Shrugged](#) is a pondering pretentious beast of a book and Ayn Rand couldn't sharpen Neal Stephenson's pencils but here I am, almost thirty years after reading Atlas Shrugged, recalling Dagny Taggart, Hank Rearden and John Galt right off the top of my head. Read Anathem for the world, the ideas and the great ride but if you're looking for memorable characters stick with Hiro Protagonist.

A Walk in the Park

Posted: 25 Feb 2011 21:47:04

At noon on February 23, 2011 I decided to get out of the office and take a little walk in nearby Faust Park. What could go wrong? Lots apparently. Faust park is in western St. Louis. It's distinguished by an [absolutely charming butterfly conservatory](#). The conservatory is a greenhouse that's maintained at 85F year round. Inside the greenhouse thousands of large iridescent butterflies are flying about, alighting on bowls of fruit, visiting feeders and gently touching blooming flowers. I had never seen so many butterflies in one place. Unlike most bugs butterflies are not annoying. As they flitted about they raised the spirits of everyone in the greenhouse. It was delightful; I could have spent my entire lunch break with the butterflies but I wanted to see the rest of the park.

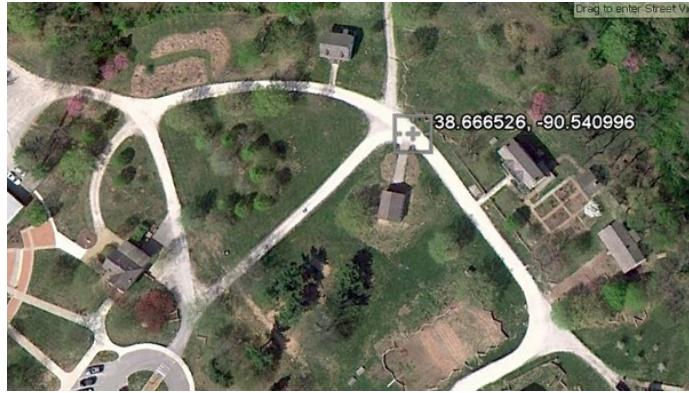
Leaving the conservatory I walked east to check out some historical buildings on the far eastern side of the park. On the way I looked in the carousel building. It was closed so I proceeded to a small white wooden one room school-house. I stayed on the gravel path as I approached the school. When I arrived I could see the building was locked and it looked like all the adjacent buildings were also locked.

My lunch break was coming to an end so I decided to walk across the park lawn back to the parking lot. I stepped on the grass. It gently sloped away from the path. Nothing seemed dangerous and the footing appeared firm.

It wasn't. The grass gave way and I fell. I fell straight down on my heels and then pitched forward. As I went down I heard two soft pops in both knees. I ended up facedown with my hands in muddy grass and both of my legs literally bent out of shape. The pain in my thighs was excruciating. I moaned and cursed and then tried to get up. *I couldn't get up!* I couldn't even straighten my legs. I was beginning to feel I was screwed!

I yelled for help but the school building blocked the view of the parking lot and a children's play area about 100 meters away. I started crawling on what was left of my knees toward the parking lot yelling help, help, help. The ground was cold and muddy and I wasn't making great headway. Fortunately a fellow named Dennis spotted me from the parking lot. He scooted over and phoned 911. He stayed with me until the 911 ambulance arrived. I didn't catch Dennis's last name so if by some remote chance you read this Dennis thanks again. You may have saved my life.

The 911 crew had trouble straightening my legs and dragging me on a wheeled



Faust Park fall location: 38.666526, -90.540996

stretcher over the lawn back towards the ambulance. They managed to get me in the ambulance and then drove me to St. Luke's hospital.

I was triaged, x-rayed and MRI'ed. Around 4:00pm the emergency room doctor told me I had completely severed both quadriceps above my knees. He also said it was extremely rare to injure both legs. Hey I've always been an outlier. They admitted me and scheduled surgery early next morning. I've had the surgery and I am now sitting in a wheelchair with both legs up. I'm writing this on my wife's Mac. I am looking at six or more weeks of painful rehab. I will bore you all with more cripple blogs because it takes my mind off the pain.

iPhoning It In

Posted: 04 Mar 2011 03:23:58

Last week I fell in Faust park and tore the quadriceps muscles above both knees. Right now I am in a skilled nursing home waiting for a change in my "weight-bearing" status. For the time being I cannot stand or even bend my knees. An outing consists of being helped into a wheelchair and rolling around the halls.

The nursing home lacks Internet access so my wife, to cheer me up, got me an iPhone with a good data plan. The iPhone is an awesome little gadget but it's not easy to type on it. I am pecking this blog entry in bed one little character at a time. I know I won't have the energy



My wheelchair'ed legs

to revise my iPhone blog entries so you get what I peck.

Top Ten Invalid Annoyances

Posted: 07 Mar 2011 23:18:36



The way I roll

I have been in the rehab/old-folks home for eight days: long enough to adjust to the routine. It's amazing how quickly we get on with a new normal. This doesn't mean I am comfortable or thrilled with my circumstances. I have a list of invalid annoyances.

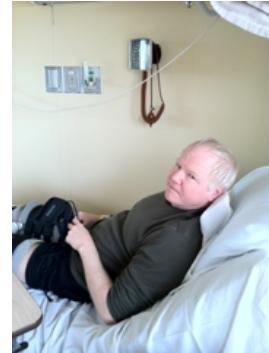
Let's do this from least to most annoying.

1. Call bells that ring for hours on end.
2. Marginal cable package: cripples don't need HBO.
3. Late night nurse chats; I had forgotten about noisy hospitals.
4. Butt-plugging food. They have been trying to give me stool softeners since my arrival. If my wife wasn't bringing food I would need them.
5. Locked courtyards. It's winter and the courtyards are locked to protect the elderly. This should be a weather dependent rather than seasonal policy.
6. Inability to put on my socks.
7. Unable to get in or out of my wheelchair without assistance.
8. Cannot shower or bathe until my cuts heal
9. Peeing into a plastic bottle.
10. And the number one annoyance: **cannot wipe my ass.** I suspect my nurses concur.

Cripple Chronicles Continue

Posted: 15 Mar 2011 23:53:21

It's coming up on three weeks since I fell and ripped my quadriceps. I am now cleared for passive, gravity assisted, flexing of my knees. This morning I managed a seventy-five degree bend. I would like to reach a full ninety degrees before the end of the week. I suspect my days of greater than ninety degrees are done. The next step is to get up in a walker. I hope this is sooner rather than later. Moving my butt from bed to wheelchair and back is wearing thin. I honestly don't know how some of the elderly residents here stand it. Unlike myself many of them will be in wheelchairs until they die. Getting old isn't for pussies!



Invalid

I'm not the only one "suffering" from my freaky fall. My poor wife is working hard bringing me meals, (hospital food did not impress her) and pitching in with everyday invalid care. She really is the best wife in the world.

I wish I could say the same about my insurance companies. Today we mailed my application for short-term disability. I will qualify; mine is a classic total temporary disability. They cannot deny coverage without facing a slam-dunk lawsuit but they will be able to impose inflexible rules.

For example, when I am on disability I cannot work and if I work, even a few hours per day, I cannot collect disability. If I had Wi-Fi and my office laptop I could put in a few remote hours even now but I cannot manage a full schedule. I expect I will end up putting in unpaid remote hours unless that is also forbidden. I cannot be out of circulation for long or my little walk in the park might end in unemployment.

Walking: It's not Overrated

Posted: 23 Mar 2011 19:54:00

Rehab has taught me that I really don't like pain! I wish I could report that I am a tough guy; that I can happily take a beating and then ask for more. Alas, that's not me. I've always considered the downside of stupid stunts and, with a few notable lapses of judgement, managed to avoid the self-inflicted injuries of my peers.

I've been more of, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," than a, "no



A Record setting walk

pain no gain,” guy. Most of the time this is sensible but when you are going through rehab the opposite holds. When your torturers, (therapists), insist on bending your broken body this way and that way, over and over again, I can assure you it’s not pain-free.

Of course there is an upside. You do improve and things get better. Today I “walked” twenty-five meters in my braces using a walker. It was a post accident record. Every day the distance and time will increase and in no time I hope to be hiking again. Walking: it’s not overrated.

Hospital Staff Training

Posted: 27 Mar 2011 21:24:16

Yesterday I transferred from Surreyplace to St. John’s rehabilitation hospital. St. John’s it’s a mainstream rehab hospital and is better equipped to deal with my situation. Now that I am allowed active leg movements the therapy will get more intense. To be honest I am not looking forward to longer and more painful sessions. Yes, I am a complete girly man when it comes to searing pain! I will have a better idea of what’s in store for me after tomorrow.

Whatever happens in therapy they will not be waking me up at 4:30 am to draw blood! You can imagine my delight at being roused from a crappy nights sleep, (try sleeping in python tight leg braces), and then being poked by a zealous staff vampire that took singular delight in telling me this little suck would be a daily ritual. Whoa cowboy: there had better be really good medical reasons for waking me up!

Half an hour later another nurse came in and tried to make me take a stomach lining



Leg pressure pump

pill. People it's 5:00 am I am not going to start pointless drugs at such an hour. Then, shortly after refusing the stomach pill another nurse was back to administer an EKG. Clearly sleep was not on the agenda.

I've been told all these tests were part of a baseline workup and that I will not be subjected to many of them tomorrow. The vampire will have to suck elsewhere. I went through the same thing at St. Luke's and Surreyplace. I don't want to train hospital staff in the delicate art of *me* maintenance but it appears unavoidable.

SmugShot Metadata Mess

Posted: 03 Apr 2011 17:53:02

While languishing in a series of hospitals and rehab centers recovering from a bad fall I have been amusing myself by taking iPhone pictures and posting them to SmugMug with SmugShot.

SmugShot is a nifty little iPhone app that uploads iPhone pictures and videos directly to [your SmugMug galleries](#). SmugShot is a freebie so I cannot, in good faith, whine about missing features but **SmugShot has one serious deficiency: it strips EXIF timestamps**. Native iPhone jpegs contain EXIF timestamps but after passing through SmugShot only GPS information survives. *I am not sure if this is by design or oversight but I don't like it!*

The fix is straight forward:



SmugShot App Logo

1. Download SmugMug metadata.
2. Download all SmugShot pictures.
3. Match pictures with metadata and use upload timestamps as date taken EXIF timestamps.
4. Finally replace the uploaded SmugShot images with the EXIF repaired versions.

Simple but tedious. The following J word manipulates Phil Harvey's [superb command line utility exiftool](#) to cleanup the SmugShot metadata mess. The words used by `smugshotexif` are in the J script [SmugShotFix.ijs](#). You can also find this script in the J files sidebar of this blog. Look in the J Scripts directory. Let's hope the next version of SmugShot fixes the date time issue and hacks like this will no longer be necessary.

```
smugshotexif=:4 : 0

NB.*smugshotexif v-- inserts missing EXIF metadata in SmugShot
NB. iPhone uploads.
NB.
NB. The iPhone SmugShot app removes EXIF information during upload.
NB.
NB. dyad: btclSmugMetaData smugshotexif clPathFile
NB.
NB. NB. update TAB delimited SmugMug metadata tables
NB. SmugTablesFrXml2 'c:\pd\docs\smugmug\data\smugheavy.xml'
NB.
NB. NB. load SmugShot specific metadata
NB. SMUGSHOTMD=: readsmugshots 0
NB. img=: 'c:\pictures\2011\Missouri\wip\1204618219_smugshot_9811805.jpg'
NB. SMUGSHOTMD smugshotexif img

NB. extract SmugMug id from SmugShot file name
spid=. <extractsmugid y

NB. all smugshot pids
pids=. x {"1~ (0{x) i. <'PID'

if. spid e. pids do.

  NB. metadata exists for image insert items
  pos=. pids i. spid

  exif=. setartistcopyright y

  NB. use upload date for the missing original datetime
  date=. ;pos { x {"1~ (0{x) i. <'UPLOADDATE'
```

```

date=. '-:' charsub date
exif=. date setdate y

caption=. ;pos { x {"1~ (0{x) i. <'CAPTION'
exif=. caption setdescription y

lb=. pos { x {"1~ (0{x) i. ;:'LATITUDE LONGITUDE'
if. *./ 0 < #&> lb do.
    lb=. _999&" . &> lb
    exif=. lb setlatlng y
end.

NB. rename as iphone file with original smugshot number
newname=. '.jpg'&beforelaststr y
newname=. 'iphone ',( '_'&afterlaststr) @:('[s'&beforelaststr) newname
shell '/\` charsub 'rename ' , ; ' ' ,&.> dblquote y;newname,'.jpg'

newname ; exif
else.
    'No SmugShot metadata for';spid
end.
)

```

More on that SmugShot Metadata Mess

Posted: 21 Apr 2011 00:06:49

A few days after posting a [J script](#) that fixes EXIF timestamps in [SmugShot](#) images SmugMug changed the filename assigned to downloaded SmugShot images. Originally the layout was:

SmugMugID_smugshot_SmugShotID.jpg

This layout was inconsistent with the way SmugMug normally handles files. Default SmugMug behavior is to **leave filenames unchanged**. This contrasts with other photo sites, ([you know who you are](#)), *that rename your sacred files to suit their indexing schemes*. A few days ago SmugMug corrected this discrepancy and downloaded SmugShot images reverted to their original format:

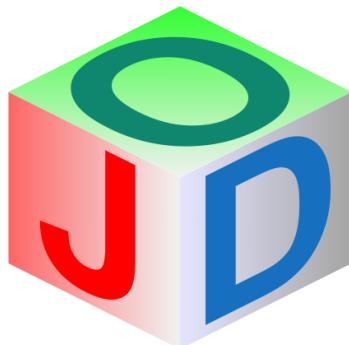
smugshot_SmugShotID.jpg

This fix broke `smugshotexif`: see: [my previous post](#). I have modified [SmugShotFix.ijs](#)

to handle the current format and the older one. I will keep tweaking this hack until SmugShot's sloppy EXIF handling is corrected.

JOD comes to Linux

Posted: 10 Jun 2011 13:00:52



Click JOD Cube for details

For years I have distributed a [J Addon](#) called **JOD**. JOD stands for **J Object Dictionary**. JOD is a code database for the J programming language. Instead of storing my J programs in text files, *like every other programmer in the world*, I break them down into the smallest reusable units. In J parlance I split my scripts into *words*.

If you are an experienced programmer I wouldn't blame you for questioning my sanity. What could possibly be gained by discounting good old-fashioned, superbly supported, ASCII/UTF8 text files? The short answer, *in trendy software engineer speak*, is [refactoring](#). JOD is a refactoring engine that works at the J word level.

What does *the word level* mean? Program text files are collections of many "words." They roughly correspond to sentences, paragraphs, sections and chapters in ordinary books. When you *reuse*, or quote, a book you typically copy passages and paste them into new contexts. Programmers call this cut and paste programming. We have all cut and pasted; it's a software sin [our prophets are constantly nagging](#) us about! JOD minimizes cut and paste programming. You no longer cut and paste or *include* you simply [get](#) lists of words. J words are closer to English words than you might expect: hence this dictionary approach pays big dividends!

With the [release of J 7.01](#) it's become clear that Windows is no longer the preeminent

J platform. The new [JGTK](#) interface works well on Windows but it *sings* on Linux. This is hardly surprising. [GTK](#) originated in the Linux/Unix world and still performs best there. Porting JOD to Linux has been on my to-do list for years. The arrival of J 7.01 got me off my butt.

JOD 0.9.3 is the first publicized Linux release. JOD code is 99% J and makes limited use of OS facilities. The port consisted of finding Linux equivalents for a handful of Windows API calls. The always helpful J community provided useful pointers. Joey Tuttle and Bill Lam basically solved my Linux [GUID](#) and file handling problems. Thanks guys.

My biggest chore was updating [JOD online documentation](#). In recent months [Google Documents](#) changed the format of their word processing documents. Google provided an upgrade tool to convert old documents to the new format but it:

1. Did not remap scores of old URLs to new URLs. I had to go through every document doing this one link at a time!
2. Totally wrecked a few documents. I reconstructed [JOD Release Notes](#) from version control logs.

Despite these irritants the new format is better. You can attach comments and download documents in [ODT](#), PDF, Word, HTML and ZIP formats. If you find problems with my documents please leave notes.

I am not completely satisfied with some restrictions imposed by JOD 0.9.3.

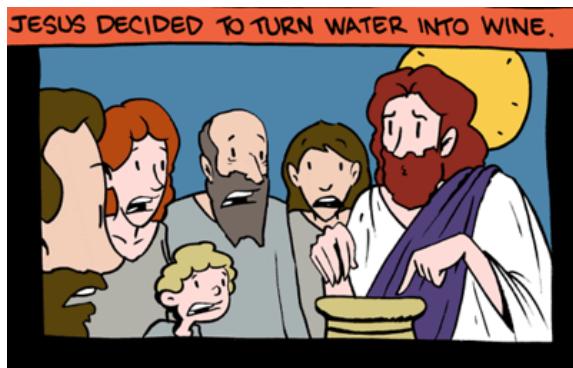
1. JOD creates dictionaries in user home directories like `/home/user/jod/...` and assumes it has the rights to create, write, copy and erase JOD files and directories.
2. No blanks in file paths, i.e., `/home/i like blanks/but jod doesnt/...` will not work.
3. Dictionary paths must begin with a forward slash, i.e., `/home/is/ok/` but `~is/nada`
4. Volume sizing reports the smallest amount of free space on all mounted volumes and not the free space on the volume containing JOD directories. I just don't know how to do this on Linux.
5. `jod.pdf` has not been updated.

I am sure there are other problems and limitations that I have missed. For more see: [Linux Notes](#). I will be releasing fixes and upgrades via [JAL](#) and on [the JOD page](#). Give JOD a whirl. It might change your J ways.

A Peculiar Book Club

Posted: 02 Jul 2011 20:23:48

While holed up in a rehabilitation hospital recovering from a nasty fall a coworker invited me to a noon-hour Bible study group. The group conveniently met in my rehab hospital so I rolled upstairs in my wheelchair and started attending their meetings. When I told my wife about this peculiar book club she thought I was suffering from post traumatic shock or had lost my mind. It's not that dramatic! I'm a [hard-ass skeptic](#) but I enjoy reading religious and mythical texts. I've plowed through vast swaths of the Bible, the Koran, the Bhagavad Gita, the Iliad, Beowulf, the Epic of Gilgamesh and the Egyptian Book of the Dead. I, like many atheists and agnostics, know far [more about these works than believers might expect](#) and consider them jewels of world literature. The Bible, the Koran and the Bhagavad Gita are still taken seriously while the greek gods of the Iliad and deities like Osiris in the Book of the Dead are no longer worshiped! Emerson said it best, "*The religion of one age is the literary entertainment of the next.*" Once you accept the view that the Bible is literature you can relax and enjoy the fabulous tales it spins. If, on the other hand, you believe you are reading "inerrant scripture" then you're in for a world of logical hurt!



Jesus makes wine - click for consequences

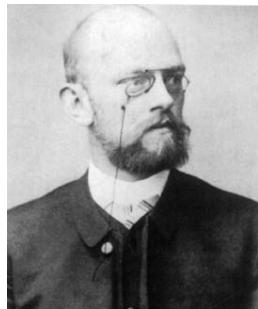
When I was younger I argued with believers, mostly Mormons in Utah and Muslims in southern Iran and northern Ghana, that only allegorical interpretations of the Bible or Koran made sense. A literal view forces you into never-ending and [embarrassing conflict with science](#) and violent clashes with other believers. You would think after millennia of religious warfare we would catch on. You cannot simultaneously be a good Hindu and Christian. Something has to give; *they both cannot be true but they*

both can be false! Believers are aware of these problems but most pull back from logically analyzing their positions. They instinctively know where analysis leads: myth will not hold. In the long run Allah and Jehovah will share Osiris's and Apollo's fate.

This is not a view I will be advocating in my peculiar book club. I am content to let others enjoy their beliefs as long as they have no material impact on me! Atheists that constantly scream about “under god” in the pledge of allegiance or “in god we trust” on the dollar annoy me! Hypothetical entities are far less tiresome than [shrieking banshees](#). If the term “God” irritates you substitute “Santa Claus.” As for militant believers of all creeds: we have a problem! The separation of church and state is one of the deepest and greatest things about the United States. It protects all of us from our mutual idiocies. I have no problems with people erecting, [on their own dime](#), plaques emblazoned with the Ten Commandments but it annoys me that religious institutions enjoy special tax status. Go to your mosques, churches and temples but pay your damn taxes!

Open Source Hilbert for the Kindle

Posted: 13 Jul 2011 04:02:12



David Hilbert

While searching for free [Kindle](#) books I found [Project Gutenberg](#). Project Gutenberg offers free Kindle books but they also have something better! Would you believe [L^AT_EX](#) source code for some mathematical classics.

The best book I've found so far is an English translation of David Hilbert's [Foundations of Geometry](#). Hilbert's *Foundations* exposed some flaws in the ancient treatment of Euclidean geometry and recast the subject with modern axioms. Because it's relatively easy to follow, compared to Hilbert's more recondite publications, this little book exercised disproportionate influence on 20th century mathematics. We still see its style aped, but rarely matched, in mathematics texts today.

I couldn't resist the temptation of compiling a mathematical classic so I eagerly downloaded the source and ran it through [L^AT_EX](#). *Foundations* compiled without problems and generated a nice [letter-sized](#) PDF. Letter-size is fine but I was looking for free Kindle books! I decided to invest a little energy modifying the source to produce a Kindle version. Project Gutenberg makes it clear that we are free to modify

the source. Isn't open source wonderful!

Converting *Foundations* was simple. The main `LATEX` file included 52 *.png illustrations with hard-coded widths in `\includegraphics` commands. I wrote a `J` script that converted all these fixed widths to relative `\textwidth`'s. This lets `LATEX` automatically resize images for arbitrary page geometries. When compiled with Kindle page dimensions this fixed most of the illustrations. I had to tweak a few `wrapfig`'s to better typeset images surrounded by text. The result is a very readable [Kindle oriented PDF version of Hilbert's book](#). There are still a few problems. The Table of Contents is a plain `tabular` that does not wrap well and one table rolls off the right Kindle margin. Neither of these deficiencies seriously impair the readability of the text. If these defects annoy you download the [Project Gutenberg source with my modifications](#) and build your own version.

This little experiment convinced me that providing free classic books, in source code form, is a service to [mankind](#). Not only does it allow you to "publish" classics on new media it also fundamentally changes your attitude toward books. Hilbert was one of the great mathematical geniuses of the 19th and 20th century. It's hard to suppress [we are not worthy](#) moments and maintain a sharp critical eye when reading his "printed" works. You don't get the same vibe when reading raw `LATEX`. Source code puts you in a, *it's just another bug infested program*, frame of mind. You expect errors in code and you typically find them. This is exactly the hard-nosed attitude you need when reading mathematics.

More on Kindle Oriented `LATEX`

Posted: 22 Jul 2011 16:09:01



I've been compiling `LATEX PDFs` for the Kindle. If you like `LATEX` typefaces, especially mathematical fonts, you'll love how they render on the Kindle. It's a good thing because *you won't like the Kindle's cramped page dimensions*. For simple flow-able text this isn't a big deal but for complex `LATEX` documents it is!

There are two basic `LATEX` \Rightarrow Kindle workflows.

1. Convert your `LATEX` to [HTML](#) and then convert the `HTML` to [mobi](#).
2. Compile your `LATEX` for Kindle page dimensions.

For *simple math and figure free documents* `mobi` is the best choice because *it's a*

native Kindle format. You will be able to re-flow text and change font sizes on the fly. There are many L^AT_EX to HTML converters. [This is a good summary](#) of your options. You can also find a variety of HTML to mobi converters. I've used [Auto Kindle](#); it's slow but produces decent results.

Compiling L^AT_EX for Kindle page dimensions is more work. First decide what works best for your document: *landscape* or *portrait*. Portrait is the Kindle default but I've found that landscape is better for math and figure rich documents. You can flip back and forth between landscape and portrait on the Kindle but it will not re-paginate PDFs. Of course with mobi this is [no problemo!](#)

After choosing a basic layout expunge all hard-coded lengths from your source *.tex files. Replace all fixed lengths with *relative page* lengths. For example, 4 inches might become `0.75\textwidth`. If you have hundreds of figures and images to adjust write a little program to replace fixed lengths. I did this while [preparing a Kindle version](#) of Hilbert's *Foundations of Geometry*.

The next hurdle to overcome is the Kindle's blase attitude about length units. L^AT_EX is extremely precise: an inch is an inch to six decimals. This is not the case on the Kindle! You will have to load your PDFs on the Kindle and inspect margins for text overflows. Be prepared for a few rounds of page dimension tweaking! For more details about preparing L^AT_EX source check out [L^AT_EX Options for Kindle](#).

Finally, after you have compiled your PDF and loaded it on your Kindle, there are some Kindle options you should set to optimize your PDF reading experience. My next post will walk you through setting these options.

The following *.tex file loads packages that are useful for Kindle sizing. It also shows how to print out L^AT_EX dimensions with the [printlen](#) package.

```
% A simple test document that displays some packages and settings
% that are useful when compiling LATEX documents for the Kindle.
% Compile with pdflatex or xelatex.
%
% Tested on MikTeX 2.9 - July 22, 2011

\documentclass[12pt]{article}

% included graphics in immediate subdirectory
\usepackage{graphicx}
\graphicspath{./image/}

% extended coloring
\usepackage[usenames,dvipsnames]{color}

% hyperref link colors are chosen to display
```

```

% well on Kindle monochrome devices
\usepackage[colorlinks, linkcolor=OliveGreen, urlcolor=blue,
            pdfauthor={your name}, pdftitle={your title},
            pdfsubject={your subject},
            pdfcreator={MikTeX+LaTeXe with hyperref package},
            pdfkeywords={your, key, words},
            ]{hyperref}

\usepackage{breqn}      % automatic equation breaking
\usepackage{microtype}  % microtypography, reduces hyphenation

% portrait kindle page geometry space reserved for page numbers
\usepackage[papersize={3.6in,4.8in},
            hmargin=0.1in,vmargin={0.1in,0.255in}]{geometry}

% landscape geometry
%\usepackage[papersize={4.8in,3.6in},
%           hmargin={0.1in,0.18},vmargin={0.1in,0.255in}]{geometry}

% headers and footers
\usepackage{fancyhdr}
\pagestyle{fancy}
\fancyhead{}        % clear page header
\fancyfoot{}        % clear page footer

\setlength{\abovecaptionskip}{2pt} % space above captions
\setlength{\belowcaptionskip}{0pt} % space below captions

% space between last top float or first bottom float and the text
\setlength{\textfloatsep}{2pt}
\setlength{\floatsep}{2pt}  % space left between floats
\setlength{\intextsep}{2pt} % space left on top and bottom of an in-text float

% print LaTeX dimensions
\usepackage{printlen}

% reduces footer text separation adjusted for page numbers
\setlength{\footskip}{14pt}

% scales page number font size if document is 12pt -> page numbers 10 pt
\renewcommand*\thepage{\footnotesize\arabic{page}}


\begin{document}

The \verb|\textwidth| is \printlength{\textwidth} which is also
\uselengthunit{in}\printlength{\textwidth} and
\uselengthunit{mm}\printlength{\textwidth}.

\uselengthunit{pt}
The \verb|\textheight| is \printlength{\textheight} which is also
\uselengthunit{in}\printlength{\textheight} and
\uselengthunit{mm}\printlength{\textheight}.

\end{document}

```

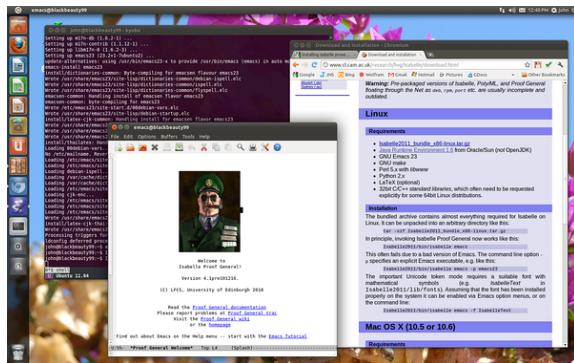
PIP News: Isabelle is Up!

Posted: 24 Jul 2011 19:59:02

Before my fall I launched a PIP (Perpetual Impossible Project). PIPs are long-range risky undertakings that cannot be finished. PIPs contradict and subvert the very notion of tightly controlled corporate style projects: hence their manifest appeal to recusants like myself.

I won't go into details about my particular PIP. Let's just say it captures every delusional notion I have ever entertained. Part of my project involved installing a few Proof Assistants. Proof assistants are programs that verify formal mathematical proofs. There are many proof assistant programs available. These programs are not mathematical magic bullets. They don't prove theorems and they don't make the job of "theorem proving" easier. To use a programming analogy: a traditional proof is like [pseudo code](#) while a formal proof is like an [assembly language](#) program. If you have ever written a nontrivial assembly language program you have some idea of the sheer effort required to produce a formal proof.

So, if formal proof only makes mathematics more difficult, why bother? This is like asking, so if implementing pseudo code only makes programming more difficult, why bother?



A screen shot of Isabelle 2011 on my Ubuntu machine. To install this program I had to convert a Windows machine to Ubuntu and install a host of Linux tools. Reaching this point represents a lot of water under the software bridge.

Debt Dolts Diddle and Drone!

Posted: 26 Jul 2011 03:42:21

Well well it turns out that when John Boehner isn't [crying like a little girl](#) he can deliver a speech. Tonight he smoked Obama like a fine cigar. I tried to flip around Obama's debt limit rant but ended up watching like a gawker at a hospital fire.

Any dolt with a fifth graders grasp of arithmetic can see [the US is completely and irrevocably broke!](#) We're in such a deep dark debt hole that we haven't seen sunlight for eons. Financial rickets is setting in; the soft bones of the republic will soon need Viagra.

But don't worry our elected pets have a plan! They're going to borrow and print more money so we can wire up our deep dark dept hole with overpriced union-made lamps connected to a green, made in China, energy source. If the government's math is right the lights should stay on long enough so we can all find our assholes and shove our heads up them!



US Fiscal Policy is the epitome of self-sodomy! I would laugh but we are way past funny.

Cowboys and Aliens and Obama

Posted: 31 Jul 2011 21:47:17



I give this better odds than “quantitative easing!”

Cowboys and Aliens (*CB*) had me at the title! Throwing Indiana Jones, James Bond and House's 13, (Olivia Wilde - the thinking man's smoking hot babe), into the mix merely turned a ridiculous premise into a cosmically absurd proposition. How could I resist?

There's no point issuing spoiler alerts, like a fine Obama speech, this schizophrenic masterpiece cannot be spoiled.

Yes I hear your [little people](#) objections, but bear with me. If we [**throw fun under the bus**](#) then *CB* is the cinematic equivalent of a typical Obama speech.

Let's review the evidence:

1. *CB* mashes together tired old western and science-fiction clichés without the slightest regard for antiquated notions like coherence and plausibility.
2. Obama (*OB*) mashes together tired old political clichés without the slightest regard for antiquated notions like effectiveness and reality.
3. *CB* conjures up big nasty bug-like aliens that literally blind the people with science so they can harvest their [precious bodily fluids](#).
4. *OB* conjures up big nasty Tea Party Republicans that blind the people with [arithmetic](#) so they can [balance the budget](#).
5. *CB* rails against the [gold standard](#). See the movie
6. *OB* rails against the gold standard. See the Federal Reserve.
7. *CB* is confused.
8. *OB* ditto.

Analogy's are never perfect and eventually the *CB = OB* symmetry breaks down. In *CB* it all works out! After dispatching the aliens the good guys are better off. When we finally *dispatch* Obama I doubt any of us will be better off.

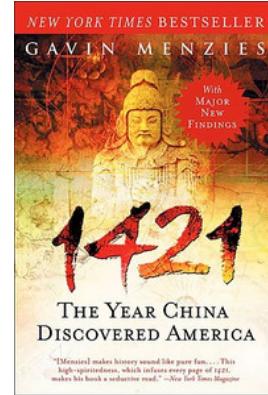


Jesus what a freak show. Hey it could be worse. I could be Obama's press secretary.

1421: The Crank History of Gavin Menzies

Posted: 11 Aug 2011 05:09:12

Crank history is big business and it's getting bigger. For reasons that infuriate skeptics there is a never-ending parade of pseudo-historians spouting rubbish that is eagerly devoured by a credulous pig ignorant public. Gavin Menzies' ludicrous tome, [1421: The Year China Discovered America](#), (also titled 1421: The Year China Discovered the World), is the finest example of delusional sophistry I've encountered since Graham Hancock's insane [Finger Prints of the Gods](#).



About the only thing you can say for Gavin's fantasy is that, (unlike Hancock's Finger Prints – the “science” behind the movie [2012](#)), 1421 is remotely plausible. It's to bad that *remotely plausible* does not make your case! Skeptics are [hard-asses](#) we demand rigorous and repeatedly verified evidence before deeming suppositions *possibly not crap!* By this standard Gavin falls way short. I'm not going to catalog Gavin's many errors, omissions and deceptions. That task has already been done by an army of critics. You can look [here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#). In particular [Bill Hartz's exhaustive demolition](#) is a bracing tonic for Gavin's numbing elixir.

To get the gist of Gavin's arguments let's look at one of his claims. On page 241, (paperback edition), Gavin first mentions the *Sacramento Junk*. The Sacramento Junk is *allegedly* the remains of a large wooden ship entombed under a sand bank in the Sacramento river of California. Ok, so far so good! We have a wooden wreck in a river. The Chinese junks Gavin imagined sailing around the world had unique characteristics that would easily distinguish them from plain old Pacific west coast wrecks. For example:

1. They had 15th century teak hulls.
2. Metal bins bolted hull compartments together.
3. They used silk sails.
4. They often carried porcelain, seeds and trade goods.

If the Sacramento Junk is the remains of a 15th century junk it looks like identifying it would be an archaeological no-brainer! All we have to do is sample the site, collect some 15th century teak wood for carbon dating, and bingo the case for the Chinese reaching the west coast of the America's before Columbus is looking promising. Gavin describes drilling into the sand bank, extracting some wood and carbon dating it to

1410. *Isn't science wonderful?*

Here are a few questions.

5. Where the hell is the Sacramento Junk?

Your impressive end-notes mention collecting samples in 2002 and 2003. I believe GPS was up and running. Could we have exact coordinates please?

6. Was the wood teak?

If you're looking for teak ships you might want to consult a wood expert. Teak, even old rotting teak, is easily identified. Look into it.

7. How many samples were carbon dated?

8. Where the hell are the lab reports, sample photographs and other documents?

9. Did you notify the historic relic Nazi's of your amazing Chinese wreck?

You almost need a permit to weed your own damn garden in California for fear of disturbing native artifacts yet somehow you pillaged an ultra-historic wreck without the *save our culture* weenies whining — yeah I once lived in California. With so many simple facts omitted you wonder if the Sacramento Junk is a figment of Gavin's lurid imagination.

Gavin repeats this pattern of building a case for the *Chinese Stopped Here* over and over again and, *without exception*, always omits basic information that would lend credence to his claims. *You need to set your bullshit detector on maximum when sailing with Gavin!*

Common Table Expression (CTE) SQLServer Queries with J

Posted: 13 Aug 2011 22:01:10

I've been blogging long enough to observe that your *awesome posts are often ignored* while your little "one-offs" sometimes strike [hit](#) gold. This is particularly true for "code example" posts. When I'm trolling for code — the geek equivalent of trolling for babes — I don't want to read about the author's programming philosophy or what the hell he thinks about the idiot in the White House. **Just show me the code and shut up!**

So, taking my own advice, the following is an example of a SQLSever [Common Table Expression](#) (CTE) query.

```

WITH cte1
    AS (SELECT c.obj_id
          AS obj_id,
        a.created
          AS creation_date,
        Datediff(DAY, a.created, Getdate()) AS day_cnt
      FROM [HIST].[dbo].[History] a
      JOIN [HIST].[dbo].[HistorySummary] b
        ON a.rowid = b.rowid
      JOIN [HIST].[dbo].[ObjectNames] c
        ON c.obj_name = b.obj_name),
    cte2
    AS (SELECT cte1.obj_id AS obj_id,
               CASE
                 WHEN cte1.day_cnt <= 30 THEN 1
                 ELSE 0
               END AS d0,
               CASE
                 WHEN (cte1.day_cnt > 30)
                     AND (cte1.day_cnt <= 60) THEN 1
                 ELSE 0
               END AS d1,
               CASE
                 WHEN (cte1.day_cnt > 60)
                     AND (cte1.day_cnt <= 90) THEN 1
                 ELSE 0
               END AS d2,
               CASE
                 WHEN (cte1.day_cnt > 90) THEN 1
                 ELSE 0
               END AS d3
      FROM cte1)
SELECT obj_id,
       SUM(d0) AS OneMonth,
       SUM(d1) AS TwoMonths,
       SUM(d2) AS ThreeMonths,
       SUM(d3) AS Overdue
  FROM cte2
 GROUP BY obj_id

```

CTE queries *essentially* create temporary virtual tables during query execution. They are similar to nested SQL queries but are easier to code, more general, (see [recursive CTE queries](#)), and often perform better than their convoluted equivalents. This example creates two virtual tables `cte1` and `cte2` that are then used to compute a quick histogram.

You can call CTE queries with the [J ODBC](#) interface. The following assumes a SQLServer ODBC connection [dsn](#) history.

```
NB. odbc interface
require 'dd'

NB. read CTE query
HistoryAgeSQL=. read 'c:/temp/HistoryAge.sql'

NB. connect sqlserver database
ch =. ddcon 'dsn=history'

NB. select with CTE query
sh =. HistoryAgeSQL ddsel ch

NB. fetch results
data=. ddfet sh,_1
```

As a final note it's worth comparing the SQL CTE histogram code with J equivalents. The two following J verbs taken from the [J wiki](#), ([here](#) and [here](#)), compute histograms.

```
NB. computes histograms uses right open intervals
histogram=:<:@(#/.~)@(i. @#@[ , I.)

NB. variation on (histogram) uses left open intervals
histogram2=:<:@(#/.~)@(i. @>:@#@[ , |.@[ (#@[ - I.) ])
```

They scale to tens of millions of data points; returning results in a few seconds on my laptop. The SQL CTE, shown above, takes about three seconds running on 180,000 row tables on my employer's full warp servers. If I could convince the masses to adopt languages like J a large part of my job would disappear. Fortunately, *the world is hostile to terse elegance!*

Typesetting UTF8 APL code with the L^AT_EX lstlisting package

Posted: 16 Aug 2011 02:27:57

Typesetting [APL](#) source code has always been a pain in the ass! In the dark ages, ([the 1970's](#)), you had to fiddle with APL type-balls and live without luxuries like *lower case letters*. With the advent of general outline fonts it became *technically*

```
!*+-/<=>?\^|~^-x÷←↑→
↓Δ∇ε◦vnū;~≠≡≠≤≥c>θ↑→
↑↓◦Γ[|I]ΘΘΦ/↗ΘΘΦ↖↑↓
↑↓ΔRΘΦ↑↓*◦ö~,↗θvñlƿω
εlα□□◊oƿ
```

UTF8 APL characters within a \LaTeX `lstlisting` environment.
Click for `*.tex` source code.

possible to render APL *glyphs* on standard display devices provided you:

1. Designed your own APL font.
2. Mapped the *atomic vector* of your APL to whatever encoding your font demanded.
3. Wrote WSFULL's of junk transliteration functions to dump your APL objects as font encoded text.

It's a testament to either the talent, or pig headedness of APL programmers, that many actually did this. We all hated it! We still hate it! But, like an abused spouse, we kept going back for more. *It's our fault; if we loved APL more it would stop hitting us!*

When Unicode appeared APL'ers cheered — our long ASCII nightmare was ending. The more politically astute worked to include the [APL characters in the Unicode standard](#). Hey if [Klingon](#) is there why not APL? Everyone thought it was just a matter of time until APL vendors abandoned their nonstandard atomic vectors and fully embraced Unicode. With a few notable exceptions we are still waiting. *While we wait the problem of typesetting APL source code festers.*

My preferred source code listing tool is the [\$\text{\LaTeX}\$ `lstlisting` package](#). `lstlisting` works well for standard ANSI source code. I use it for J, C#, SQL, C, XML, Ocaml, Mathematica, F#, shell scripts and \LaTeX source code, i.e. everything except APL! `lstlisting` is an eight bit package; it will not handle arbitrary Unicode out of the box. I didn't know how to get around this so I handled APL by enclosing UTF8 APL text in plain `\begin{verbatim} ... \end{verbatim}` environments. This works for $\text{Xe}\text{\LaTeX}$ and $\text{Lua}\text{\LaTeX}$ but you lose all the `lstlisting` goodies. Then I saw an interesting [tex.stackexchange.com](#) posting about [The ‘listings’ package and UTF-8](#). One solution to the post's “French ligature problem” showed how to force Unicode down `lstlisting`'s throat. I wondered if the same method would work for APL. It turns out that it does!

If you insert the following snippet of TeX code in your document preamble Lua^LATE_X and X^LATE_X will properly process UTF8 APL text in lstlisting environments. You will need to download and install the [APL385 Unicode](#) font if it's not on your system. A test L^ATEX document illustrating this hack is available [here](#). The compiled PDF is available [here](#). As always these files can be accessed in the files sidebar.

```
% set lstlisting to accept UTF8 APL text
\makeatletter
\lst@InputCatcodes
\def\lst@DefEC{%
\lst@CCECUse \lst@ProcessLetter
  ^^80^^81^^82^^83^^84^^85^^86^^87^^88^^89^^8a^^8b^^8c^^8d^^8e^^8f%
  ^^90^^91^^92^^93^^94^^95^^96^^97^^98^^99^^9a^^9b^^9c^^9d^^9e^^9f%
  ^^a0^^a1^^a2^^a3^^a4^^a5^^a6^^a7^^a8^^a9^^aa^^ab^^ac^^ad^^ae^^af%
  ^^b0^^b1^^b2^^b3^^b4^^b5^^b6^^b7^^b8^^b9^^ba^^bb^^bc^^bd^^be^^bf%
  ^^c0^^c1^^c2^^c3^^c4^^c5^^c6^^c7^^c8^^c9^^ca^^cb^^cc^^cd^^ce^^cf%
  ^^d0^^d1^^d2^^d3^^d4^^d5^^d6^^d7^^d8^^d9^^da^^db^^dc^^dd^^de^^df%
  ^^e0^^e1^^e2^^e3^^e4^^e5^^e6^^e7^^e8^^e9^^ea^^eb^^ec^^ed^^ee^^ef%
  ^^f0^^f1^^f2^^f3^^f4^^f5^^f6^^f7^^f8^^f9^^fa^^fb^^fc^^fd^^fe^^ff%
  ^^^^20ac^^^^0153^^^^0152%
  ^^^^20a7^^^^2190^^^^2191^^^^2192^^^^2193^^^^2206^^^^2207^^^^220a%
  ^^^^2218^^^^2228^^^^2229^^^^222a^^^^2235^^^^223c^^^^2260^^^^2261%
  ^^^^2262^^^^2264^^^^2265^^^^2282^^^^2283^^^^2296^^^^22a2^^^^22a3%
  ^^^^22a4^^^^22a5^^^^22c4^^^^2308^^^^230a^^^^2336^^^^2337^^^^2339%
  ^^^^233b^^^^233d^^^^233f^^^^2340^^^^2342^^^^2347^^^^2348^^^^2349%
  ^^^^234b^^^^234e^^^^2350^^^^2352^^^^2355^^^^2357^^^^2359^^^^235d%
  ^^^^235e^^^^235f^^^^2361^^^^2362^^^^2363^^^^2364^^^^2365^^^^2368%
  ^^^^236a^^^^236b^^^^236c^^^^2371^^^^2372^^^^2373^^^^2374^^^^2375%
  ^^^^2377^^^^2378^^^^237a^^^^2395^^^^25af^^^^25ca^^^^25cb%
  ^^^00}
\lst@RestoreCatcodes
\makeatother
```

New Conan not as Philosophical as Old Conan

Posted: 19 Sep 2011 01:48:35

Bad news philosophers, our preeminent social critic, our font of wisdom, our modern Socrates has succumbed to the malignant Hollywood poisons of [reality TV](#), [celebrity whoring](#), [financial ennui](#) and [hopeless incompetent governance](#). Given the forces arrayed against our philosopher king only Vegas bookies on crack would favor his chances. I knew all this when I sat down to view the latest [Conan the Barbarian](#)

movie but I let hope trump reason — sound familiar. If I wasn't a mainly-man I would cry for no longer will we ponder religious dissertations like:

Crom! I have never prayed to you before. I have no tongue for it. No one, not even you, will remember if we were good men or bad. Why we fought, or why we died. All that matters is that today, two stood against many. That's what's important! Valor pleases you, Crom; so grant me this one request. Grant me revenge! And if you do not listen, then to hell with you!

Or learn about what's good in life:



Click for what's good in life

My friends that golden Apollonic age is past! Now we must content ourselves with Eat, Pray, Love travesties like:

I live, I love, I slay, I am content.

When did Conan the Barbarian decide to come out?

Iranian Regime Justice is pathetic Sharia Savagery.

Posted: 30 Sep 2011 16:17:02



Yousef Nadarkhani

I rarely comment on the “news” but the planned execution of Yousef Nadarkhani for the make-believe crime of Islamic apostasy has really pissed me off. Once again the Iranian branch of the “religion of peace” shows its primitive, ass-backwards, subhuman side to a stunned world that finds it hard to believe that *changing your mind about fictitious religious nonsense is punishable by death!* It’s rubbish like this that turned me into a hardcore atheist. If this is Sharia then Sharia is shit!

Let's be perfectly clear. I am not condemning Iranians. I am married to an Iranian! I have many lovely Iranian in-laws, and not a single one of them approves of this atavistic [assinity](#). Like civilized people everywhere their feelings alternate between disgust, shame and rage. While I forgive the Iranian people I condemn the Iranian regime. The government courts that imposed this sentence are pathetic throwbacks. They don't belong in the modern world and one day they won't.

Savages always assume they can bully and terrorize people forever. At first people are easily cowed but even the most egregious assaults fail to deter in the long run. The next time the Iranian masses take to the streets the regime will fall and with the exception of a few *islaminals* nobody is going to miss it!

P.S. Before you go all brave fatwa waving kafir killing jihad warrior on me keep in mind that Missouri is a concealed carry state.

I lose another battle with Gravity

Posted: 09 Nov 2011 17:08:05



24 Hour Fitness

Yesterday I found myself back in Saint Luke's emergency department being asked what day it was. An hour before I had stepped into the shower at 24 Hour Fitness over on Clayton, I had just finished my noon hour workout. I try to force myself to the gym at least four times a week. It's one of my many delusional projects. I've always wanted the lithe, lean muscular body of Spider Man but since I cannot cling to walls I've never managed the trick.

As I stepped into the shower I suddenly felt sick to my stomach, it was a good pre-vomit feeling, I briefly thought about sitting down but then I stepped into the hot water and then ... the next thing I remember ... I was lying on my back on the shower floor with a few nude guys looking down at me. A guy off to my side said, "you were out for bit," another added, "you hit your head when you fell." Apparently, if the news could be believed, I had fallen out of the shower stall on my back. I couldn't remember a thing. *I had passed out in the freaking shower!* My first thought, "oh goody one concussion coming up," I oddly didn't care about my naked body inelegantly sprawled over harsh shower floor tiles for all to admire. See you can get over gym shower shyness.

Of course this alarmed the gym staff, we live in a litigious, sue on the drop of — in this case my body — age. They dutifully took notes and advised me to ride the

ambulance to emergency. “It wouldn’t be a good idea to drive away and pass out on the highway.” They had me there! The EMT guys arrived, strapped me up to an electrocardiogram, started an IV and then hauled my ass over to Saint Luke’s where I am almost on first name basis with the staff. One of the nurses said, “I remember you, weren’t you [the guy that tore his quadriceps?](#)” I enjoy being recognized if only it was somewhere other than emergency. Emergency staff plugged me into electric doo-dads, drew my blood, measured my oxygen levels measured and shined lights into my eyes. An earnest and very nice resident carefully interviewed me and declared I had experienced a [syncopal episode](#). Google it, it doesn’t sound good, I may be a dead man walking or I could have just overdone it at the gym. Time will certainly tell.

Old white guys look at the sky!

Posted: 20 Nov 2011 22:35:44

Last Friday I joined the [Saint Louis Astronomical Society](#) (SLAS). In the last twenty years I have been a member of two chapters of the [Royal Astronomical Society of Canada](#): [Kingston](#) and [Ottawa](#), the [Forth Worth Astronomical Society](#) in Texas, the [Minnesota Astronomical Society](#) in Saint Paul and the [Orange County Astronomers](#) in southern California. No matter where I go I can see the sky and I can find people who share my interest in it. The SLAS is very similar to other clubs. If you were to walk into a typical astronomy club meeting your overwhelming impression would be: *old white guys like looking at the sky!*



The undeniable old whiteness of astronomy clubs is a concern because it tells you something about the health of our culture. If you think I am pulling your leg or being sarcastic consider the following.

1. **Club members have strong *noncommercial* or *unprofessional* interests in science.** Most are not professional astronomers or even scientists. Few derive any income from their interests in astronomy and many spend insane amounts of time and money building telescopes, observing the sky and keeping up with findings in astronomy and related sciences. What’s the point? Wouldn’t these people be better off devoting the time they “waste” on astronomy to more productive pursuits? Mind you the same applies to *unprofessional* artists and hobbyists of all types that “waste” comparable amounts of time on their

own “pointless” pursuits. Astronomy club members love what they do, and, in my experience, it’s a constant and enduring love that never dims or goes away. Anyone with a real passion knows what I’m talking about.

2. **Astronomy club members respect, understand and value scientific arguments.** We are constantly reading depressing assessments of the public’s dismal understanding of science. For example, 44% of the US public accepts that, “[God created man pretty much in his present form at one time within the last 10,000 years.](#)” Only 5% of scientists accept this nonsense and [even 5%](#) seems to high for my skeptical ass. Astronomy club members will poll more like scientists than the general public on this question. A society that depends on science yet harbors ignorant masses that do not grasp or appreciate basic scientific findings will not hold.
3. **Club members welcome anyone with an interest in astronomy.** I have belonged to half a dozen astronomy clubs and without exception they welcome anyone with an interest in the subject. I have never seen somebody turned away, or discouraged, for reasons of race, age, sex, sexual orientation, political or religious affiliations, or social class. Astronomy clubs are about as egalitarian as it gets! It gets better. Most clubs nurture and cherish the youngsters in their midst’s. This is partly because we don’t see a lot of youngsters and by youngster I mean anyone under thirty!

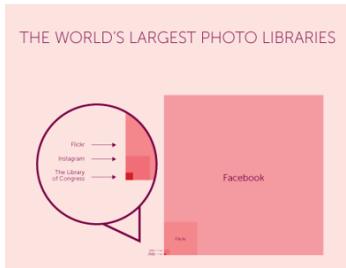
So why are astronomy clubs in North America old and white? Do people think you need expensive telescopes and other pricey gadgets to enjoy amateur astronomy? I’ve looked at the sky for decades primarily with binoculars. They are still the best way to learn the sky. Has the public’s interest in science declined during the last forty years? Is elementary science education worse than it was when I was a child? Is the XBox’ed and Avatar’ed generation bored with looking at faint smudges in the sky? *Finally, do we smell?* I don’t know why astronomy clubs are old and white but I do know that I will probably be associated with one until the day I die.

[Revenge of the PhD Camera](#)

Posted: 05 Dec 2011 05:01:51

Cameras come in two flavors. There are expensive *serious* cameras used by serious photographers to take serious photographs and then there are PhD, ([Push here Dummy](#)), cameras. Serious cameras meet the highest technical standards, lenses are diffraction limited, chromatic aberration approaches zero, pixel counts match [Nyquist](#)

[limits](#), ISO's exceed retinal sensitivity, auto-focus is instantaneous, color spaces are wide, calibrated and range into the infra-red and ultra-violet. *PhD cameras don't go there! PhD cameras provide a button for dummies to push.* Over the years I've ying'ed and yang'ed from serious to PhD cameras. It's not that I cannot make up my mind. Camera choice is another eternal struggle sort of like that squabble between good and evil or light and regular beers.



Worlds largest photo libraries



Hipstamatic water meter

When I'm on a serious photography kick I put time, expertise and money into my pictures. For me serious photography is exhausting. I seek out worthy subjects, wait for the *right light*, agonize over composition, experiment with lenses, tweak *f-stops*, adjust shutter speeds and take as many exposures as light and time allow. Then the post shutter ordeal begins. Digital imaging processing makes anything possible. You can take your exposures and like some mad photo-shopping Rumpelstiltskin spin straw into gold. But, as in the fairy tale, there is a high price, perfect images will suck years out of you. Photographers often talk about *workflow* and they aren't kidding. When I start tweaking my workflow I know I'm reaching the end of my serious rope. Photography is one of my hobbies and I never ruin hobbies by turning them into jobs!

Eventually I snap out of it and resume PhD'ing. Unlike serious photography PhD'ing is effortless and fun. It's always been fun, remember [Brownies](#) and [Instamatics](#), but this is the golden age of *PhD photography!* In the last decade PhD cameras have evolved and mutated from cheap plastic boxes filled with grainy high-speed ISO film to sophisticated little internet photo-shopping



Mixing up cell phone color channels

engines that ride around in our pockets as cell phones. I don't even know why they are called cell phones. My iPhone takes hundreds of images for every *phone call* it processes. It's really more of an iCamera+iBrowser that can, on rare occasions, be used as a phone. Based on [surveys of web image sites](#) I am not the only iCamera user. PhD photography is growing faster than the national debt.

Explosive growth attracts armies of sinners and saints. Every two-bit whore chasing a buck is now writing image processing software for cell phones. In the last two years we've seen apps that [stitch panoramas on the fly](#), apply [cheesy photo-shop effects](#) and automatically create [HDR](#) images by blending two or more exposures. As Sturgeon's law predicts most of these apps are crap but that's not a problem for PhD photography. The goal is to offer a fun button for dummies. My favorite PhD app is a great little toy called [Hipstamatic](#). Hipstamatic simulates crappy old PhD film cameras loaded with expired film. You can choose a lens, a film and a flash or you can just shake your iPhone and let it randomly select these parameters. Shake and shoot; it's the revenge of the PhD camera.

The Instagram Metadata Massacre

Posted: 14 Dec 2011 23:19:45

I've been playing around with the iPhone app [Instagram](#). I decided to give this freebie a try after a gaggle of soulless self promoting Apple marketing zombies declared it "imaging [app of the year](#)." Instagram, like [Hipstamatic](#), (which incidentally stopped working after the last update), crops iPhone images to squares, applies hokey filters and then offers you the opportunity to "share" or print your masterpieces on related websites. Apparently Instagram is already one of the words largest on-line photo libraries. Considering Instagram images are filtered iPhone shots it's almost certainly *the world's second largest online collection of crappy throw-away shots. Facebook is the largest if you're wondering!*



Instagram Fingers

You probably sense that I am not drinking the Instagram cool-aid. Instagram is a fine fun freebie but it strips EXIF data from the images it drops in the iPhone camera roll. This is the second [iPhone EXIF exterminator](#) I have encountered. I have this thing about EXIF data; it annoys me when software massacres it. Here's a little poem:

*Exterminate EXIF - NOT
Let it be*

*Set your fricking EXIF free
Alas, with Instagram, it's not to be!*

Blogging off for Christmas

Posted: 23 Dec 2011 22:02:36

I am celebrating Christmas by combining two of my favorite things: the [programming language J](#) and the superb image editor [Picture Window Pro](#). The other day the good folks at [Digital Light and Color](#) announced 64 bit versions of Picture Window Pro. I was delighted. PWP is my favorite image editor. It's had 16 bit image support since the cows came home and it simply nukes Photoshop when it comes to flat-out crunching performance. I was afraid that the good old-fashioned C programmers that had crafted this program were retiring: perhaps overwhelmed by a sea of mediocre consumer oriented overpriced sludge — *yes Photoshop Elements I'm talking about you!* Fortunately it's not to be! 64 bit multi-core versions of PWP will dramatically extend the lifetime of PWP for this loyal customer.

Speaking of superb good old-fashioned C programs I must give a shout out to J. I've been busy preparing a talk for the up coming [J conference](#) so J has been on my mind more than usual. Still [all work and no play makes J a dull boy!](#) This morning I rooted around in the J bin directories, sucked some J icons into PWP, and then twiddled transformations to generate some Christmas J monitor wallpaper: download and decorate at will!

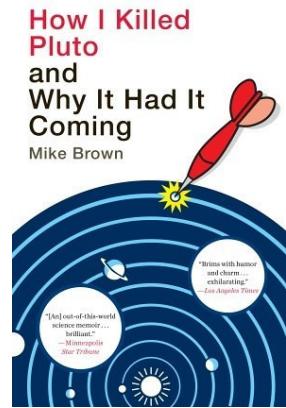


J Christmas Wallpaper

2012

Mike Brown Punts Pluto

Posted: 29 Jan 2012 07:12:40



As a longtime amateur astronomer I appreciate good science writing and Mike Brown's little book [How I Killed Pluto and Why It Had It Coming](#) is a wonderful example of the genre. When Pluto was tossed from the pantheon of planets I didn't care. I knew that in previous centuries, when asteroids were first discovered, that they were briefly counted as planets. Eventually asteroids lost their planet status; there were too many of them and they were all dinky compared to real planets. Brown notes this bit of astronomical history by pointing to 19th century textbooks with high planet counts. The same holds for Pluto, [Eris](#), [Sedna](#), [Quaoar](#) and all the other known baby ice balls that make up the [Kuiper belt](#).

Real planets are massive enough to clear their orbits of crap. By this standard Mars barely qualifies and Pluto does not.

The [emotional hysterics](#) that greeted Pluto's demise are still playing out. [Some reviews posted here castigate Brown](#) in terms rightly applied to suicide bombers and Obama voters. When Pluto bulks up and starts bullying its neighbors like all manly planets do we'll talk until then I'd advise the puerile Pluto partisans to plumb up their pie holes otherwise we'll have to toss you in the crank bin with the creationists and cold fusion nitwits.

cross posted on [Goodreads](#).

WordPress to L^AT_EXwith Pandoc and J: Prerequisites (1)

Posted: 12 Feb 2012 01:33:11

There are no quick WordPress to L^AT_EX fixes Over the next three posts I will describe how to convert WordPress's [export XML](#) to L^AT_EX source code.

I know that many of you are looking for a quick WordPress to L^AT_EX fix; unfortunately there are no quick fixes. The two formats come from different worlds and are used in different ways. Producing useful L^AT_EX source from WordPress export XML will

require manual edits. My goal here is to minimize manual edits, produce high quality L^AT_EX source and to *outline* what you will have to contend with. To get an idea of what you can expect download the [L^AT_EX compiled version of this post](#).

Visual and Logical composition WordPress and L^AT_EX are examples of the two basic approaches, *visual* and *logical*, taken by writing software. Visual systems value appearance. It matters what things look like and no effort is spared to get the right look. Logical systems value content. What's said is far more important than what it looks like. Logical systems impose order and structure and typically defer visual elements. As you might expect there is no such thing as a pure visual or logical writing system. Successful systems use both approaches to a greater or lesser degree. Composing WordPress blog posts is roughly 35% visual and 65% logical.¹ L^AT_EX composition is about 10% visual and 90% logical. The numbers do not line up; there is a basic mismatch here.

Many format X to L^AT_EX converters tackle this mismatch by attempting to maintain visual fidelity. This is a catastrophic error that renders the entire conversion useless. Here's a hint. If you're using a predominantly logical system like L^AT_EX you don't give a rodent's posterior about visual fidelity. This method dispenses with all but the most basic of visual elements. No attempt is made to preserve fonts, type sizes, image scale, justification, hyphenation, text color and so forth. The goal is to produce working L^AT_EX source that can be transformed to whatever final layout the author desires.

Prerequisite Software I use two programs to transform WordPress export XML to L^AT_EX the [J programming language](#) and [John MacFarlane's Pandoc](#). Pandoc is an excellent [text mark-up](#) to mark-up converter. It wisely avoids attempting to convert entire complex documents and focuses on getting *parts* of documents right. It does a particularly good job of converting HTML to L^AT_EX which is a *crucial* part of this process. I use Pandoc to transform the HTML embedded in WordPress export XML [CDATA elements](#) to `*.tex` files and I use J to preprocess and post process Pandoc inputs and outputs and to stitch everything together into a set of L^AT_EX ready files.

Download Pandoc from [here](#). I use the Windows command line version. There are Linux and Mac versions as well. Download J from [here](#). The easiest J install is the 32 bit Windows J 6.02 version. Other versions require additional steps to configure

¹Actually this is not bad. [Page layout systems](#) are far worse. A typical layout system might be 90% visual and 10% logical making layout systems polar opposites of L^AT_EX.

and deploy. If you are already a J user there is no need to install a particular system but you will need:

1. The task library `require 'task'`
2. The utility program `wget.exe`

Both of these components are typically part of the J distribution.

Install and check prerequisites To continue download and install Pandoc and J and run the following tests; if you succeed your system is ready for [WordPress to L^AT_EX with Pandoc and J: L^AT_EX Directories \(2\)](#).

Pandoc Test: Download the test file: `cdata.html` and run Pandoc from the command line:

```
pandoc -o cdata.tex cdata.html
```

`cdata.html` is an example of the HTML code you find in WordPress export XML `CDATA` elements. *Note:* required files are also available in the files sidebar in the [WordPress to L^AT_EX](#) directory.

J Test: Start a J session and enter the following commands:

```
require 'task'
shell 'wget --help'
site=. 'http://conceptcontrol.smugmug.com/photos/'
shell 'wget ',site,'i-mNK4RHL/0/L/i-mNK4RHL-L.png'
```

If the shell command is properly loaded and `wget.exe` is found you will see help text. The second shell command downloads an image file. Downloading post images is part of the overall conversion process.

[WordPress to L^AT_EX with Pandoc and J: L^AT_EX Directories \(2\)](#)

Posted: 19 Feb 2012 00:32:46

In this post I will describe the L^AT_EX directory structure the J script `TeXfrWpxml.ijs` is expecting. To convert WordPress export XML to L^AT_EX with this script you will have to set up similar directories.

\LaTeX documents are built from `*.tex`² files. This makes \LaTeX more like a compiled programming language than a word processing program. There are advantages and disadvantages to the \LaTeX way. In \LaTeX 's favor, the system is enormously adaptable, versatile and powerful. There is very little that $\text{\LaTeX}/\text{TeX}$ and [associates](#) cannot do. Unfortunately, “[with great power comes great responsibility](#).” \LaTeX is demanding! You have to study \LaTeX like any other programming language. It's not for everyone but for experienced users it's the best way to produce documents with the highest typographic standards.

\LaTeX directory structure To use \LaTeX efficiently it's wise to pick a document directory structure and *stick with it*. I use a simple directory layout. Each document has a root directory used by `TeXfrWxml.ijc` is:

Windows	<code>c:/pd/blog/wp2latex</code>
Linux	<code>/home/john/pd/blog/wp2latex</code>

I put my document specific `*.tex`, `*.bib`, `*.sty` and other $\text{\LaTeX}/\text{TeX}$ files in the root. To handle graphics I create an immediate subdirectory called `inclusions`.

```
c:/pd/blog/wp2latex/inclusions
```

The inclusions directory holds the document's `*.png`, `*.jpg`, `*.pdf`, `*.eps` and other graphics files. To reference files in the inclusions directory with the standard \LaTeX `graphicx` package insert

```
\usepackage{color,graphicx,subfigure,sidecap}  
\graphicspath{{./inclusions/}}
```

in your preamble. Finally, to track document changes I create a [GIT](#) repository in the root directory.

```
c:/pd/blog/wp2latex/.git
```

Self contained directories I take care to keep my document directories *self-contained*. Zipping up the root and inclusions directory collects *all* the document's files. This means that I sometimes have to copy files that are used in more than one document. Many \LaTeX users maintain a common directory for such files but I've found that common directories complicate moving documents around. You're always

² \LaTeX uses many other file types but key files are usually `*.tex` files.

forgetting something in the damn common directory or you are copying a buttload of mostly irrelevant files from one big confusing common directory to another.

TeXfrWpxml.ijjs files The `TeXfrWpxml.ijjs` script searches for these files in the root directory.

`bm.tex` Main LaTeX root file
`bmamble.tex` [L^AT_EX](#) preamble

`bm.tex` references `bmttitlepage.tex`. I prefer a separate title page file; simply comment out this file if you create titles in other ways. The zip file [wp2latex.zip](#) contains a test directory in the format expected by `TeXfrWpxml.ijjs`. It also has a subset of my blog posts already converted to L^AT_EX. To get ready for [WordPress to LaTeX with Pandoc and J: Using TeXfrWpxml.ijjs \(3\)](#) download `wp2latex.zip` and attempt to compile `bm.tex`. You might have to download a number of LaTeX packages. Once you have successfully compiled `bm.tex` you are ready for the next step.

[WordPress to L^AT_EX with Pandoc and J: Using TeXfrWpxml.ijjs \(3\)](#)

Posted: 26 Feb 2012 02:38:53

In this post I will describe how to use the J script `TeXfrWpxml.ijjs` to generate L^AT_EX source from WordPress export XML. I am assuming you have worked through [\(Part 1\)](#) and [\(Part 2\)](#) and have:

1. Successfully installed and tested [Pandoc](#).
2. Installed and tested [a version of J](#).
3. Set up appropriate directories ([Part 2](#)).
4. Know how to use [L^AT_EX](#).



WordPress to L^AT_EX

Item #4 is a *big* if. Inexperienced L^AT_EX users will probably not enjoy a lot of success with this procedure as the source generated by `TeXfrWpxml.ijjs` requires manual edits to produce good results. However, if you're not a L^AT_EX guru, do not get discouraged. It's not difficult to create blog documents like `bm.pdf`.

Step 1: download WordPress Export XML How to download WordPress export XML is described [here](#). Basically you go to your blog's dashboard, select **Tools**, choose **Export** and select the **All content** option.



Tools > Export > All Content

When you press the **Download Export File** button your browser will download a single XML file that contains all your posts and comments. Remember where you save this file. I put my export XML here.

```
c:/pd/blog/wordpress/analyzethedatanotthedriver.wordpress.xml
```

Step 2: download `TeXfrWpxml.ijjs` Download `TeXfrWpxml.ijjs` and remember where you save it. I put this script here.

```
c:/pd/blog/TeXfrWpxml.ijjs
```

Step 3: start J and load `TeXfrWpxml.ijjs` `TeXfrWpxml.ijjs` was generated from [JOD dictionaries](#). With JOD it's easy to capture root word dependencies and produce complete standalone scripts. `TeXfrWpxml.ijjs` needs only the standard J load profile to run. It does not require any libraries or external references and should run on all Windows and Linux versions of J after 6.02. Loading this script is a simple matter of executing:

```
load 'c:/pd/blog/TeXfrWpxml.ijjs'
```

The following shows this script running in a J 7.01 console. The console is the most stripped down J runtime.

Step 4: review directories and necessary L^AT_EX files The conversion script assumes proper directories are available up: see [Part 2](#). The first time you run `TeXfrWpxml.ijjs` it's a good idea to check that the directories and files the script is

```
J C:\j701\bin\jconsole.exe
load 'c:/pd/blog/TexfrWpxml.ijs'
NB. interface word(s):
NB.   LatexFrWordpress  NB. experimental conversion of Wordpress XML to LaTeX
NB.   MarkdownFrLatex   NB. converts edited LaTeX post files to image free markdown
```

expecting are the ones you want to process. You can verify the settings by displaying `TEXFRWPDIR`, `TEXINCLUSIONS`, `TEXROOTFILE` and `TEXPREAMBLE`.

```
TEXPREAMBLE
bmamble.tex
TEXFRWPDIR
c:/pd/blog/wp2latex/
TEXINCLUSIONS
inclusions
TEXROOTFILE
bm.tex
TEXPREAMBLE
bmamble.tex
```

If all these directories and files exist go to step (5).

Step 5: make sure you are online The first time you run the converter it will attempt to download all the images referenced in your blog. This is where `wget.exe` gets executed. Obviously to download anything you must be connected to the Internet.

Step 6: run `LatexFrWordpress` Run the verb `LatexFrWordpress`. The monadic version of this verb takes a single argument: the complete path and file name of the export XML file you downloaded in step (1).

```
xml=: 'c:/pd/blog/wordpress/analyzethedatanotthedrivewordpress.xml'
LatexFrWordpress xml
```

As the verb runs you will see output like:

```
LatexFrWordpress xml
Whats In it for Facebook?
downloading: c:/pd/blog/wp2latex/inclusions/demotivational-posters-facebook-you.jpg
```

```

1 downloaded; 0 not downloaded; 0 skipped
Fake Programming
downloading: c:/pd/blog/wp2latex/inclusions/672169130_vajvn -M.png
1 downloaded; 0 not downloaded; 0 skipped
Laws or Suggestions
downloading: c:/pd/blog/wp2latex/inclusions/i-B5mfdRF -M.jpg
1 downloaded; 0 not downloaded; 0 skipped
Lens Lust

... many lines omitted ...

downloading: c:/pd/blog/wp2latex/inclusions/i-mNK4RHL -M.png
1 downloaded; 0 not downloaded; 0 skipped
WordPress to LaTeX with Pandoc and J: LaTeX Directories (Part 2)
0 downloaded; 0 not downloaded; 1 skipped
+---+
|1|||
+---+

```

When the verb terminates you should have a directory `c:/pd/blog/wp2latex` full of `*.tex` files: one file for each blog post. Now the hard work starts.

Step 7: editing L^AT_EX posts The conversion from WordPress XML to L^AT_EX produces files that require manual edits. The more images, video, tables and other elements in your posts the more demanding these edits will become. My blog has about one image per post. Most of these images are wrapped by text. L^AT_EX has a mind of its own when it comes to *floating figures* and getting illustrations to behave requires far more parameter tweaking than it should. This is a longstanding weakness of L^AT_EX that pretty much everyone bitches about. My advice is start at the front of your document and work through it post by post. The files generated by `LatexFrWordpress` do not attempt to place figures for you but they do bolt in ready-made figure templates as comments that you can experiment with. Each post file is also set up for separate L^AT_EX compilation. You don't have to compile your entire blog to tweak one post. The one good thing about this edit step is once you have sorted out your old posts you do not have to revisit them unless you make major global document changes. The next time you run `LatexFrWordpress` it will only bring down new posts and images.

Step 8: compile your L^AT_EX blog I use batch files and shell scripts to drive L^AT_EX compilations. I processed my blog with this batch file.

```

echo off
rem process blog posting (bm.tex) root file
title Running Blog Master/LaTeX ...

rem first pass for aux file needed by bibtex
lualatex bm

rem generate/reset bbl file
bibtex bm
makeindex bm

rem resolve all internal references - may
rem comment out when debugging entire document
lualatex bm
lualatex bm

rem display pdf - point to prefered PDF reader
title Blog Master/LaTeX complete displaying PDF ...
"C:\Program Files\SumatraPDF\SumatraPDF.exe" bm.pdf

```

The presence of Unicode APL, see [this post](#), forced me to use lua^LA_TE_X. I needed some very nonstandard APL fonts. See **bm.pdf — also available on the [Download this Blog](#) page** — to judge the effectiveness of my edits. Producing nice figure laden typeset blog documents is work but, as I will describe in the next post, *producing image free eBooks is a simple and far less laborious variation on this process*.

Turn your Blog into an eBook

Posted: 05 Mar 2012 02:44:38

If you have worked through the exhausting procedure of converting your blog to L^AT_EX: see posts [\(1\)](#), [\(2\)](#) and [\(3\)](#), you will be glad to hear that turning your blog into an image free eBook is *almost effortless*. In this post I will describe how I convert my blog into EPUB and MOBI eBooks.

eBooks how the cool kids are reading eBook readers like [Kindles](#), [Nooks](#), iPads and many cell phones are optimized for plain old prose. They excel at displaying [reflowable](#) text in a variety of fonts, sizes and styles. One eBook reader feature, dear to my old fart eyes, is the ability to increase the size of text. All eBooks are potentially large print editions. There are other advantages: most readers can store hundreds, if not thousands of books, making them portable libraries. It's now technically possible

to hand a kindergarten student a little tablet that holds every single book he will use from preschool to graduate school. The only obstacle is the [rapacious textbook industry](#) and their equally [rapacious eBook publishing enablers](#). But fear not open source man will save the day. *The days of overpriced digital goods are over!* I will never pay more than a few bucks for an eBook because I can make my own and so can you! Let's get together and kill off another industry that so has it coming!

PDFs, EPUBs and MOBIs Native eBook file formats like EPUB and MOBI do not handle complex page layouts well. If your document contains a lot of mathematics, figures and well placed illustrations stick with PDF workflows.³ You will save yourself and your readers a lot of grief. But, if your document is a prose masterpiece, a veritable great American novel, then “publishing” it as an EPUB or MOBI is a great way to [target](#) eBook readers. EPUBs and MOBIs can be compiled from many sources. I start with the [LATEX](#) files I created for the [PDF version of this blog](#) because I hate doing the same boring task twice. By far the most time-consuming part of converting WordPress export XML to [LATEX](#) is editing the [pandoc](#) generated `*.tex` files to resolve figures and fix odd run-together-words and paragraphs. To preserve these edits I use pandoc to convert my edited `*.tex` to `*.markdown` files.

Markdown [Markdown](#) is a very simple text oriented format. A markdown file is completely readable exactly the way it is. All you need is a text editor. Even text editors are overkill. You could compose markdown with early 20th century mechanical typewriters; it’s a low tech format for the ages: perfect for prose.

The J verb [MarkdownFrLatex](#)⁴ calls pandoc and converts my `*.tex` files to `*.markdown`. I place my markdown in the directory

```
c:/pd/blog/wp2epub
```

and to track changes to my markdown files I [GIT](#) this directory. [MarkdownFrLatex](#) strips out image inclusions and removes typographic flourishes. When it succeeds it writes a simple markdown file and when it fails it writes a `*.baddown` file. Baddown files are `*.tex` files that contain [lstlistings](#) and complex figure environments that are best resolved with manual edits. After removing such problematic [LATEX](#) environments the J verb [FixBaddown](#) calls pandoc and turns baddown files into markdown files.

³LATEX is usually compiled to PDF making it one of hundreds of PDF workflows.

⁴All the J verbs referenced in this post are in the script [TeXfrWxml.ijss](#)

Generating EPUB and MOBI files When the conversion to markdown is complete I run [MainMarkdown](#) to mash all my files into one large markdown file with an eBook header. The eBook header for this blog is:

```
% Analyze the Data not the Drivel  
% John D. Baker
```

The first few lines of the consolidated `bm.markdown` file are:

```
% Analyze the Data not the Drivel  
% John D. Baker  
  
#['Whats In it for  
Facebook?](http://bakerjd99.wordpress.com/2009/09/05/whats-in-it-for-facebook/)  
  
-----  
  
*Posted: 05 Sep 2009 22:44:50*  
  
[Facebook](http://www.facebook.com) is huge: they brag about a user  
count well north of one hundred million. If only 0.5% of their users are  
active 'thats 500,000 *concurrent users.* How many expensive servers  
does it take to support such a load? .....
```

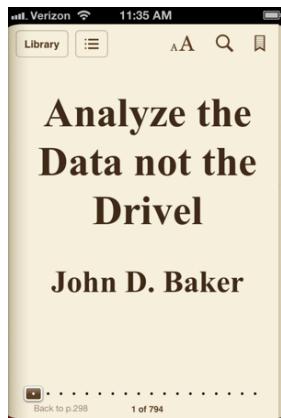
Generating an EPUB from `bm.markdown` is a simple matter of opening up your favorite command line shell and issuing the pandoc command:

```
pandoc -S --epub-cover-image=bmcover.jpg -o bm.epub bm.markdown
```

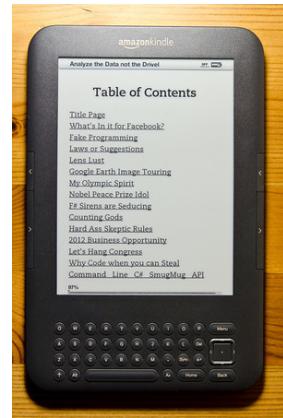
You can read the resulting EPUB file [bm.epub](#) on any EPUB eBook reader. Here's a screen shot of `bm.epub` on my iPhone.

The last step converts `bm.epub` to `bm.mobi`. MOBI is a native Kindle format. Pandoc can generate MOBI from `bm.markdown` but it inexplicably omits a table of contents. *No problemo*: I use [Calibre](#) to convert `bm.epub` to `bm.mobi`. Calibre properly converts the embedded EPUB table of contents to MOBI. Here's `bm.mobi` on a Kindle.

All the “published” versions of this blog are available on the [Download this Blog](#) page so please help yourself!



iPhone loaded with [bm.epub](#)



Kindle loaded with [bm.mobi](#)

The Joys of Photographic Waybacking

Posted: 18 Mar 2012 03:37:32

Remember [Mr. Peabody's Wayback Machine](#). Mr Peabody was dog, with a pet boy Sherman, that used his Wayback time travel machine to visit the past. I'm not sure if he ever visited the future; that's a question best left to [Rocky and Bullwinkle historians](#). Well, I have Wayback machines; they're called film and flatbed scanners. I spend way to much time scanning and restoring old photographs. Over the years I've scanned thousands of images. It only takes a few minutes to get a high quality scan but it can take days of image editing to restore old damaged originals. Hence, I always have a backlog of scanned pictures to fix.

My enthusiasm for this endless task waxes and wanes with my general photographic energies. A few weeks ago I upgraded my arsenal of DSLR cameras and lenses. New lenses always give me boast. So lately I've been out pixel harvesting with a lovely little $f2.8$ macro lens. I think she I will be an item for years to come — wide open her bokeh is beautiful. While I enjoy working with my spanking new crystal clear digital images I often find myself wandering in my vast image file directories and picking out old scans to work on. Today I whiled away a rainy afternoon restoring pictures I took over forty years ago. Here's a shot from my [ACS Beirut Lebanon](#) boarding school days. This is from an old [Instamatic](#) camera. I believe it was my second camera. Over the years my cameras have gotten better and better but they still cannot go Wayback in time.

The Hunger Games: a Libertarian Dead Teenager Movie.

Posted: 24 Mar 2012 23:12:49



I've always enjoyed watching teenagers die. Even when I was a teenager, back in the early Pleistocene, I couldn't get enough adolescent annihilation. Now that I am a certified, some would say certifiable, drooling old fart boomer I enjoy it even more. Youthful folly: it's riveting entertainment for the elderly. Given my macabre inclinations I looked forward to the [Hunger Games](#) with the same — *oh my god, lol, like enthusiasm* — of a screeching teenage girl which, oddly, is the movie's target demographic. Well did the Hunger Games disappoint and, more importantly, is it worth ten bucks? In two words: **no** and **yes**.

The world of the Hunger Games is your typical progressive green fascist paradise. The sort of place our [global warming alarmists](#), whale saving [eco-warriors](#), [Volt driving poseurs](#), [anti-capitalist philosophers](#) and [leader venerating loons](#) would like to live. Panem, the principal nation-state depicted in the Hunger Games, is split into two familiar classes: the haves and the have-nots. The haves live in a gleaming special [Capitol](#) city and the have-nots grunge away their pointless little people lives in twelve impoverished out-lying districts. Naked force keeps everything in a nice green line. Sure the people in the Capitol while away their carefree days in an endless who can dress like the gayest circus clown contest while the peons in the outer districts fantasize about bread but [sacrifices must be made to manage our carbon footprint](#).



Lying on my bed and trying to look tough for the camera. I don't think the pajamas are helping. This image is from an old Kodacolor Instamatic slide taken in 1968. In the original scan fingerprints are visible. I take good care of originals but accidents happen. For more before-after diptychs click.

To break the oppressive tedium of face painting, hair dressing and color coordination every year the rulers of Panem select twenty-four lucky teenage [Tributes](#) from the twelve out-lying districts and make them fight to the death in Panem's version of ultimate survivor: The Hunger Games. There's some background filler about how the games are a punishment and reminder of a long ago civil war that went badly for the out-lying districts. The games, as one smarmy TV announcer played by [Stanley Tucci](#) said, "bring us together." Yeah, there's nothing like raw fear and continual humiliation to bring a people together.

Face paint and swashbuckling hot heroine, (played by [Jennifer Lawrence](#)), aside the world of the Hunger Games is the most credible Sci-Fi dystopia to emerge in years. The laws of physics hold in this movie! There's no flying faster than the speed of light, no summoning of magical or supernatural forces and no hinging entire [pocahontian](#) plot lines on imaginary [Unobtainium](#). Nothing depicted in the Hunger Games is, as far as we know, impossible. We could build Panem today with off-the-shelf technology. It's probably lost of the popcorn crowd but the world's physical plausibility is a powerful frame for the story because this shit has already happened. The mayhem of Hunger Games is no worse than what transpired for centuries in Roman amphitheatres, Aztec ball courts or medieval jousting tournaments. Humans can be gamed to the death for the filmiest of reasons. This is the real horror of the film; it's not much a stretch from where we've been, to where we are, to what we might become.

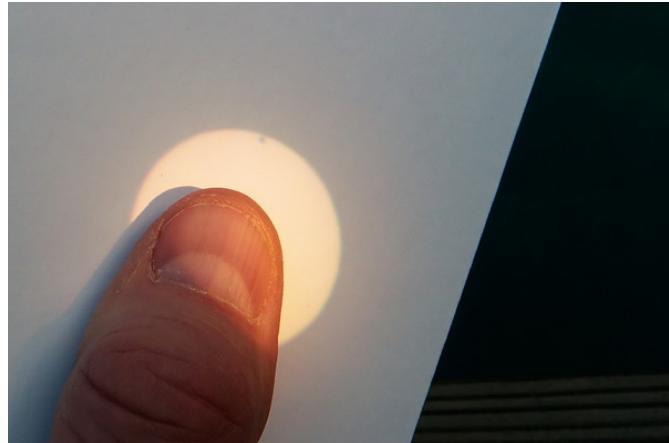
I do not fear imaginary monsters; there are plenty of real ones to worry about and the real Hunger Game monsters are with us now. Our biggest monster is our naive belief that we've put all this aside: that no modern democratic state could degenerate into a tidy Panemian tyranny, that liberty and freedom, once achieved, is eternal. I'm not so sanguine; we're a lot closer to a Panem than you might think. If you handed out firearms to the contestants of your average reality TV show we'd be there: minus the green high-speed maglev trains of course. (Don't worry there's a stimulus [boondoggle](#) for the maglev trains.) Ask yourself, if we armed the [Kardashians](#) and made them fight to death on TV how many would care, how many would be relieved, how many Vegas bets would be made? I suspect most would dress up in their gayest apparel and party like Panemians celebrating another dead teenager.

2012 Venus Transit and Annular Eclipse

Posted: 22 Apr 2012 23:05:20

I'm gearing up for two big eminent celestial events. On May 20th I'll be near Page

Arizona observing an annular eclipse of the Sun and on June 5th, weather permitting, I'll be in St. Louis watching Venus creep on the disc of the Sun for the last time in my lifetime.



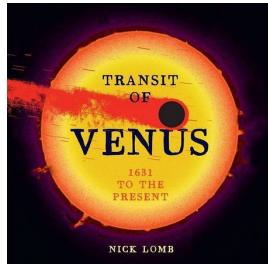
2004 transit of Venus from Ottawa Canada. I used 10x50 binoculars to project an image of the Sun. The little dark spot on Sun's limb is the planet Venus.

Eclipses and transits are spectacular events for amateur astronomers and innocent bystanders. Of the two eclipses offer the greater spectacle. In fact, for sheer unbridled *awesomeness*, it's hard to beat a total eclipse of the Sun! You can add up all the World Cups and Super Bowls ever played and they would barely register on the logarithmic total solar eclipse spectacle scale. [The one total solar eclipse I saw](#) easily ranks as the greatest thing I've ever seen and I'm including the births of my children. The May 20th solar eclipse is annular so it's not in the same galaxy as a total but annular's have their charms. At maximum eclipse the Sun appears like a perfect blazing ring of light. In Page it will be 10 degrees above the north-western horizon: a good altitude for composing solar landscape pictures.

By comparison the June 5th transit of Venus will not be a big show. Without proper equipment you won't be able to see it at all. During transit Venus looks like a little black dot on the Sun. The best way to see this event is with telescope or binocular projection. **Under no circumstances should you look directly at the Sun without proper eye protection!** For safe transit viewing techniques look [here](#). In 2004 I used binocular projection to view the last transit of Venus from Ottawa Canada. Transits of Venus come in pairs, eight year apart, followed by over a century before the next pair. After 2012 you will have to wait until 2117 to see another transit of Venus. This is our last chance people. Yeah mortality seriously blows.

Blurb: Nick Lomb's Transit of Venus

Posted: 06 May 2012 20:58:33



Nick Lomb's [Transit of Venus 1631 to the Present](#) is the best illustrated astronomy book for general readers since Terence Dickinson and Alan Dyer's [The Backyard Astronomer's Guide](#). Everything about Lomb's book from its eye seizing cover, rarely seen historic photographs and charming well researched commentary is first class. *Transit* is the type of work you steal⁵ from and frankly, there is no better endorsement than that. I'm not the only reader to reach this conclusion check out [this](#) and [this](#) and [this](#).

When prowling our few remaining bookstores I often skip illustrated works. Usually they're dumbed-down rehashes of familiar material but, in *Transit*'s case, I learned something on my first randomly browsed page. The chapter introduction for Venus of the South Seas reads:

Sometimes scientific expeditions have unintended consequences. The desirability of observing the 1769 transit from the South Seas began a chain of events that would lead to the founding of the colony of New South Wales by the British in January 1788. In effect, modern Australia owes its existence to a celestial event.

How about that history haters. I knew why astronomers cared about transits of Venus. In 1677 Edmond Halley, of Halley's Comet fame, described a method for calculating the astronomical unit from transit of Venus timings. Venus is close enough to the Earth that its track over the Sun differs for widely separated terrestrial observers. This is the familiar parallax effect. From this small difference you can determine the astronomical unit and if you know the astronomical unit [Kepler's third law](#) tells you the distance of every planet in the solar system. This was a huge payoff for 17th, 18th and early 19th century astronomers. This is what got [Cook](#) out in the Pacific. It's a great story and Lomb's telling is the best you will find.

GPX from Google Maps KML J Script

Posted: 17 May 2012 03:50:01

In preparation for my Arizona jaunt to watch the May 20th [annular eclipse](#) I spent a

⁵I've picked up a few page design ideas.

few hours on Google Maps selecting locations to visit. Here are my prime targets.



Click for current map

After selecting targets the next step is to load them onto my “GPS device.” Currently my GPS device is the [MotionX GPS iPhone](#) app. MotionX can read GPX files in many ways *but you need GPX files not Google Maps KML files*. Converting KML to GPX is a recurring nuisance. I’ve used [online converters](#) for this chore but today, after being annoyed by this problem for the zillionth time, I dashed off a [J script](#) that transforms Google Maps KML to GPX. The main verb `gpxfrmakml` is shown below. The [entire script is available here](#) and in the files sidebar. Browse to the J Scripts directory. Happy KML to GPX’ing my friends.

```
gpxfrmakml=:3 : 0

NB.*gpxfrmakml v-- gpx from Google maps kml.
NB.
NB. monad: clGpx =. gpxfrmakml clKml
NB.
NB.   NB. download Google map waypoints as kml
NB.   kml=. read 'c:/temp/arizona annular eclipse.kml'
NB.
NB.   NB. convert to gpx and save
NB.   gpx=. gpxfrmakml kml
NB.   gpx write 'c:/temp/arizona annular eclipse.gpx'

NB. parse kml form waypoint table
dname=. ;'name' geteletext '<Placemark>' beforestr y
wpt=. ;'Placemark' geteletext y
wpt=. ('name' geteletext wpt) ,. <.;_1&> ',&,&.> 'coordinates' geteletext wpt
hdr=. ;:'phototitle longitude latitude'
```

```

NB. format gpx header
gpxstamp=.  'Waypoints: ',(":#wpt),' GPX generated: ',timestamp''
gpxheader=.  '/{{headername}}/','dname','/{{headerdescription}}/','gpxstamp'
gpxheader=.  gpxheader chaneestr GPXFRKMLHEADER
gpxtrailer=.  GPXTRAILER

'idx_pkml'=. HTMLVARBPATTERN patpartstr GPXSMUGPLACEMARK
rvarbs=. idx htmlvarbs pkml

NB. all row variables must exist in data header
assert. *./ rvarbs e. hdr
rows=. (#wpt) # ,: pkml
rows=. ((hdr i. <'phototitle'){"1 wpt") (<a:;(rvarbs i. <'phototitle'){idx}) rows
rows=. ((hdr i. <'latitude'){"1 wpt") (<a:;(rvarbs i. <'latitude'){idx}) rows
rows=. ((hdr i. <'longitude'){"1 wpt") (<a:;(rvarbs i. <'longitude'){idx}) rows

gpxheader ,(;rows),gpxtrailer
)

```

The Wahweap Wow

Posted: 22 May 2012 21:27:58

Last weekend I was in Page Arizona to visit my parents and catch the May 20th 2012 annular solar eclipse. Page is a little town that owes its existence to the construction of the Glen Canyon dam in the early 1960's. The reservoir behind the dam, Lake Powell, has appeared in so many movies that [it should collect royalties](#). Charlton Heston crashed his spaceship here in the first and [only good Planet of the Apes movie](#). John Travolta nuked the place in [Broken Arrow](#). Even Jesus Christ used Lake Powell as a Dead Sea ringer in [The Greatest Story Ever Told](#).



Glen Canyon dam

Page, the dam and Lake Powell did not disappoint. I had a great time toodling around [shooting pictures](#). I only had one day which was partly devoted to the eclipse but I saw enough to give Glen Canyon an unqualified thumbs up. If you're into rocks, desert and water this place is [bucket list](#) material. Like MacArthur I will return.

While pleased with Glen Canyon I was surprised by the large number of people who turned out for the annular eclipse. The US park service in conjunction with local

amateur astronomers set up viewing grounds on Wahweap Overlook and ran full size shuttle buses from the nearby Carl Hayden dam visitor center. At least four busloads of eclipse fans were carried to the overlook where they joined more amateur astronomers and serious eclipse photographers that had set up dozens of telescopes and cameras for the big show. There must have been at least four hundred people on Wahweap Overlook and Wahweap was only one of many sites where people set up to watch the eclipse. It's gratifying to see that when a *real star* puts on a show the audience is huge.



Wahweap eclipse fans

Before the eclipse started, and during the early phases when the Moon was creeping on the Sun's disk, I walked around looking through telescopes. Two scopes stood out. One expensive large aperture [Hydrogen Alpha](#) scope served up gorgeous high-resolution views of the Sun. In Hydrogen Alpha light solar prominences , filaments and photosphere mottles are clearly visible. The big Hydrogen Alpha scope put on a good show but bang for the buck went to a 15 dollar light funnel

that a 14-year-old made by hand and attached to a small refractor. His makeshift funnel projected the brightest and clearest white light image of the Sun. I told him his projection was the best; he was happy to hear it.

As the eclipse approached the annular phase I set up my camera. I didn't have the right filter, only a 4D neutral density, but I thought I'd give it a try. When the light ring formed I fired off a few shots. The filter didn't cut enough light so I immediately gave up and went to plan B. Plan B consisted of covering the lens of my iPhone with eclipse shades and [PhD'ing it](#). I took a few frames and managed to catch the ring. It was a minor triumph of [iPhoneography](#). After that I just gawked through my eclipse shades while the Sun and Moon wowed the masses with their dance. The crowd burst into applause when the ring broke but, sadly, the performers declined an encore.

As I have already said, annulars are not in the same awe-inspiring class as totals but this annular, falling where it did, was special. From the overlook you could see the lake, the dam, towering red rock formations and of course the sky. The perfect ring of light was just the icing on the cake of a Wahweap wow!



iPhone image captured by holding
eclipse shades over the lens



Lake Powell houseboats

Brett Kimblerlin Free Speech Hating Criminal SOS

Posted: 25 May 2012 19:19:51

Today I'm joining a [free speech blogburst](#) in support of [bloggers harassed and threatened](#) by Brett Kimberlin ([SOS](#)) and his butt monkeys. Brett has a problem with people pointing out his bomb detonating [criminal terrorist](#) past but, unlike your typical effeminate impotent lefty whiner, Brett isn't going to take any truth-telling lying down. No Brett is going to wage scorched earth [lawfare](#) and if that isn't good enough get some of his unhinged goons to threaten violence. Yes, Brett practices the restrained dispassionate discourse advocated by [The One](#). Unfortunately Brett has pissed off some real men and women and those of us with gnarly gonads and fertile ovaries will not be intimidated by our intellectual, moral and cosmetic inferiors. So sue me if you want Brett. Threaten me if you have the balls but before you get in my face keep in mind that Missouri is a concealed carry state.



Brett Kimberlin speedway bomber mug shot. Bret doesn't want you to know about his criminal past. Bret needs to [FOAD!](#)

RAW development rubs me Raw

Posted: 27 May 2012 22:31:08

I'm exhausted. For the last four nights I've been up late *Lightroom'ing* the pictures I took on my [little Arizona annular eclipse trip](#). I'm a new Lightroom user and I'm not entirely impressed with the program. It's a first class general **RAW** developer but I don't think it's as good as [Capture NX](#) when working with Nikon NEF files. For the nonce I will keep Lightroom'ing away; *you have to master something before you can have a valid opinion about it!*



Lonely Lake Powell boat at dusk

As annoyed as I am about Lightroom I know, from bitter experience, that *when I first process images I only see problems*. The composition sucks. The colors are off. Things are too dark or to light. After a few dozen disappointments the mood darkens and I wonder just *who the fuck took all this shit?* But I soldier on, waging relentless pixel warfare, because in few years, when I've forgotten about light curves, sharpening parameters, edge masks, color spaces and all the technical [hoo-hah](#) that goes into digital image making, I start seeing the pictures not the flaws. I sometimes catch myself looking at my old pictures and wondering just who took all these great shots. You change your mind about pictures!

This is why I don't use "star" ratings. Most image management systems have ratings. Lightroom has a five-star system, [Thumbsplus](#) does something similar and every image management tool I've looked at has a comparable feature. Obviously the masses expect and demand ratings. Too bad the masses are wrong. In the long run ratings are meaningless. You really see this with restoration projects. I've spent days [restoring pictures](#) that what I would rate as total crap if I had just shot them. Yet here I am spending long hours on yesterday's crap.

Restoration work also changes your attitude about duds. In my film days I ruthlessly pruned my slides and negatives trashing exposures that didn't meet my standards *of the time*. Now I curse that [delusional jackass](#) for throwing away my precious originals. It's surprising how useful duds are; they fill in missing details and remind you of your ever-changing opinions. Save your duds I guarantee you will feel differently about them in a few years and, of course, others will have completely different takes.



Annular eclipse fans

Evil Queens are getting Hotter

Posted: 03 Jun 2012 20:50:25

There's not a lot of good news out there. Our currencies are being sodomized by [economic imbeciles](#). High unemployment has demoralized the masses and forced lobotomized bureaucrats to get off their entitled asses and [redefine it](#). The suck—oops stock—market has returned [SFO](#) for a decade. CO₂ levels are rising. [The seas](#) are not subsiding; they didn't get [The One's memo](#). Goons are [getting nukes](#). Species are [going extinct](#). The freaking LA Kings are two up in the Stanley Cup finals and, [Mohammed](#) in a [transvestite musical](#), the [Kardashians](#) are still on TV. In this bleak, soul suffocating, [Obamalypse](#) we must take solace from any quarter and I've found one; *evil queens are getting hotter!*

This positive trend surfaced with TV's [Once Upon a Time](#): a rare, well written, series that ripped familiar fairy tale characters out of children's books and deposited them in Storybrooke: a small *fictional* town in Maine. All of our favorite characters are present: Snow White, Little Red Riding Hood, Pinocchio, Rumplestiltskin and, outclassing them all, Regina, Snow White's poison apple wielding nemesis the Wicked Queen played by [Lana Parrilla](#). Regina is no hook nosed NPR feminist hag. This

wicked queen is a high-caliber alpha cougar. Frankly, I envy her victims. Please Regina; make me your next man-toy.



Regina *Once Upon a Time*'s wicked queen. Can I be your boy toy?

An even hotter queen is Ravenna, another incarnation of Snow White's mortal enemy, from [Snow White and the Huntsman](#). Huntsman is a dark straight up high-tech rendering of Snow White's tale. The movie is competent but is afraid of veering off well-trodden material. I found it flat and predictable. Great movies astonish, good movies surprise, ordinary movies entertain and bad movies are lauded by liberal film critics.



Ravenna in her spa enjoying some well deserved evil queen *me time*.

Huntsman is ordinary but has its charms. The best character is [Charlize Theron's](#) wicked queen Ravenna. Ravenna has an endearing nasty bitch habit. She must periodically slurp up the life force of attractive young women to stay "the fairest of them all." Think of it as extreme celebrity Botox. You may object to Ravenna's ravishing methods but you cannot argue with the results. This wicked queen is setting new standards for maximum babe bad.

As a mainly manly man I thank the [FSM](#) for Regina and Ravenna. Evil queening: it's not for obese dykes anymore.

Venus puts a period on our Time

Posted: 07 Jun 2012 01:58:30

I left work early yesterday to scoot down to Forest Park, one of St. Louis's best city parks, and take in the transit of Venus. The [St. Louis Astronomical Society](#)

conducted a public outreach event on the grounds of the World's Fair Pavilion. The pavilion sits atop a small hill with a good view of the western horizon. Many club members had set up telescopes for the public. Some scopes projected images of the sun and others used solar filters. It was [another large daytime star party](#). Hundreds of people showed up and patiently waited in telescope lines to get a glimpse of Venus crossing the Sun.

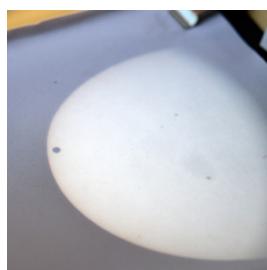


Worlds Fair Pavilion in St. Louis's Forest Park on Venus transit day.

The mood was curious and somber; parents urged their children to look and remember. Many dutifully complied but you could see they were more interested in running around the pavilion than watching a little black dot. Maybe some will remember in the decades to come; maybe one or two will live to see the next transit but for the rest of us the little black dot of Venus is a “period” to the sentence of our time. We will never see Venus’s silhouette on the Sun again. Venus will circle on punctuating future epochs but we, my friends, will soon cease to exist — period.

[Controlling Cell Phones the new IT Frontier](#)

Posted: 09 Jun 2012 17:08:31



A [Sunspotter](#) transit of Venus projection.

It won't be long before your employer starts jamming or [confiscating](#) your *personal* cell phone. Wait a minute isn't that a tad hyperbolic? Wouldn't that trigger an avalanche of "freedom of speech" lawsuits? Wouldn't people yell "fornicate elsewhere" and quit? Ahh, if only it were so. I would love to be wrong about this but I have a superb track record when it comes to predicitng IT control freak trends.



In my long programming career I've never met a "liberty loving" IT manager. There's something utterly intoxicating about being in a place where reliable minions, (dead computers for the most part), completely manifest your vision. I've watched the most libertarian of programmers turn into [Dilbertian despots](#) when tasked with network security, software procurement or SOX compliance. IT's first impulse is to control, control and control even if control is counterproductive.

Personal cell phones are on the IT hit list.

Here's the sad news. *Most IT polices are counterproductive and they never fix the problems they claim to address.* Consider my case. I have never introduced a network virus, distributed proprietary company information or collaborated with competitors. Everywhere I've worked had specific IT policies for these, and other *corporate crimes*, but I could have easily circumvented 95% of them at any time. The only defense any of my employers ever had was *my personal honesty and integrity.*

Unfortunately my personal honesty and integrity is beyond the control of IT and, as I have said before, [control is key when it comes to IT](#). If IT cannot control it they won't even recognize it! This is why we end up with abominations like [SOX](#) — perhaps the most ludicrous bit of micro-managing nonsense ever foisted on American companies. Incidentally SOX does [SFO](#) when it comes to preventing the Enronesque crimes it was intended to prevent. Don't believe me, ask [Jon Corzine about where MF's billions went](#).

Exactly where do personal cell phones fit into IT policies? When cell phones first appeared they were just phones. Now they're web browsers, cameras, microphones, stereos, GPS receivers and recently full-fledged programming environments. So much power and all outside of IT's control. Most employers keep lists of banned websites. What's the use of tasking neutered lackeys with maintaining a list of banned websites if an employee can whip out an iPhone and browse at will? What's the point of banning USB drives and locking down proprietary files if you can take a quick snapshot of your monitor and post it on Facebook? IT has a personal cell phone problem and

I can guarantee that whatever twisted solution their misguided minds fixate on *it will have nothing to do with employee honesty and integrity.*

Ooh Promethean Tentacles

Posted: 17 Jun 2012 06:02:06

Prometheus breaks the first rule of movies: *don't make your audience think!* Any movie that violates this taboo gets exactly what it deserves and Prometheus is begging for it.

Let's get the good stuff out-of-the-way. Prometheus looks great. It throws up one fabulous tableau after another. To all the set designers, CGI programmers and other visual artists that worked on Prometheus take a bow; you did a superb job. I am not kidding when I say this would be a better film if you simply turned off the brain numbing sound track and soaked in the sights. Unfortunately the sound track is left on letting us in on the shallow thoughts of the too stupid to live protagonists.

I won't dissect Prometheus's numerous Promethean logical affronts. The blogosphere has already [boiled and rendered](#) that beast. Google the phrase "Prometheus too stupid to live"; the deluge of scorn will restore your faith in mankind. I could join in the script-savaging but I'm a kind, loving and compassionate man. I like science fiction. I want science fiction screen writers to succeed but the poor lost souls need help. Here are three "rules" that might have saved Prometheus.

1. Any "number" that appears in a science fiction movie must be real.

Numbers incite analysis and analysis plops you right back into reality which is not a good place for any movie especially science fiction. Prometheus violates this rule early on.

When the spaceship Prometheus arrived at its multiple-star-grouping destination the film makes a point of informing us that it's 3.27×10^{14} kilometers from Earth. My little cinema bound brain went to work. A light year is roughly 10^{13} kilometers thus Prometheus was about thirty light years from Earth. I'd turned my cell phone off to watch the movie so I didn't check the [Hipparchus star catalogue](#) but I'm pretty sure



Hey let's wander around in the dark and feed vagina snakes.

turn off the brain numbing sound track and soaked in the sights. Unfortunately

there are no large visible multiple star groupings that close to Earth. It's possible a grouping of nearby brown dwarfs has escaped detection but then the color balance of the giant planet the spaceship was approaching was all wrong.

Flashing bogus numbers distracts and infuriates audiences. If you must insert numbers in your scripts make sure they are 100% scientifically credible.

2. Do not populate your spaceship with suicidal dolts.

It's hard to relate to complete brain-dead tools. About halfway through Prometheus I realized the only creatures acting sensibly were the tentacle waving predatory aliens. They were busy going about their prey stalking ways. I can only imagine what they thought.

"Hey Sam," alien vagina snakes call themselves Sam, "can you believe this fool wants to pet me. I bet his esophagus is going to be really tasty."

"Uh, I don't know Sam; something that stupid couldn't survive in the wild unless it was highly toxic."

"Yeah, you may be right but I'm going take a chance and stuff myself down his pie hole anyway."

Nobody mourns the death of imbeciles. Sympathetic characters should have at least room temperature IQs.

3. Never show superior beings.

Good science fiction works best in the imagination of its audience. Nurturing a sense of mystery, awe and wonder is what this genre is all about. Showing too much kills the imagination and frankly my imagination took a few sniper rounds to the head when a "superior engineer" turned out to be bald, ripped, roid-raging bodybuilder that was as stupid as every other character in this film.

If the Prometheus of myth was as reckless as this "engineer" then Zeus did us a solid when he chained his dumb ass to that rock.

Turn your iPhone into a jPhone

Posted: 23 Jun 2012 15:24:15

Jsoftware recently released a *free* J app for the iPhone. Search for "jsoftware" in Apple's app store and you will land right on it. There are many excellent free iPhone

apps, I have half-a-dozen on my iPhone, but this little jewel sets a new standard for power in your palm.



Let's start with the good news; this is not a crippled version of J. It's the same high-caliber interpreter that J programmers have used on Windows, Linux and Mac machines for years. Anything this app's big desktop brothers can do this little app can do. You won't see the same blistering desktop speed but I think you'll be pleasantly surprised at how fast this app munches numbers. I have run desktop J since the 1990's and J on the iPhone 4 matches or beats what I was seeing on laptops ten years ago. This is the real J deal.

Now for a few caveats — this J app is not a complete J development environment. To meet Apple's restrictive app store rules C-style APIs, JAL addons, GUI tools and third-party libraries like `opengl` and `lapack` are not included. With this app you get the J interpreter and a few of the most useful J addons like `plot`. Despite these limitations this J app is probably the most powerful, *purely local*, calculator available for the iPhone.

Don't believe me? Turn off Wi-Fi and set your iPhone to Airplane mode: Airplane mode cuts off phone and internet access. Now try computing [the following](#) on your favorite iPhone calculator.

```
NB. generate one million random numbers and average them
(+/ % #) ? 1000000#10000

NB. generate a 50 50 random matrix, invert it and multiply with the
NB. original - rounding to the nearest 0.0001 to form an identity matrix
round=: [ * [: <. 0.5 + %~
matrix=: ? 50 50 $ 10000
invmat=: %. matrix
identity=: 0.0001 round matrix +/ . * invmat

NB. sum of the diagonal elements of matrix (identity) is 50
50 = +/ (<0 1) |: identity

NB. multiply two polynomials with complex number coefficients
polyprod=: +//. @(*/)

NB. complex number coefficients - AjB is J's notation for A + Bi
poly0=: 2j5 3j7 0 1
poly1=: 1j2 0 3j7 0 0 2
```

```

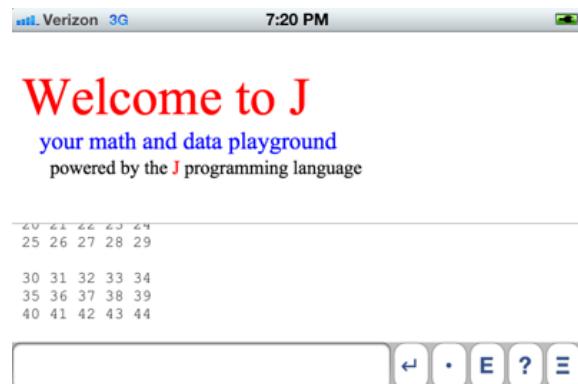
poly0 polyprod poly1

NB. prime factorization table of 50 random integers less than one billion
(<"0 nums) ,: -.&0 &.> <"1 q: nums=.50?1e9

```

The J app blows through these examples on my iPhone 4 in a few seconds. Of course this is only a tiny taste of what J on the iPhone is capable of. I have managed to run 1000+ line J scripts on this app. The only desktop J code I have not been able to run depends on external compiled libraries like [regex](#).

Cell phones are powerful little computers and it's gratifying to finally see software that can focus that power on something other than [Angry Birds](#). If you're interested in learning an array oriented functional programming language or if you're already familiar with J and want to *pack serious computational heat* then this app is for you!



J running on the iPhone

Mac JOD

Posted: 27 Jun 2012 18:39:06



The [J addon](#) JOD now runs on Macs. You can update [JOD](#), or install it for the first time, with [JAL](#). JOD now runs on all the major J hosts: Windows, Linux and the Mac.

To keep track of host specific features I have started a series of version documents. The Mac document is [here](#).

At the upcoming [J conference](#), (July 23-24, 2012), in Toronto I will show an iPhone version of JOD. And, as a reward for attending the conference and my little presentation, *Writing Portable J addons*, I will be raffling off hardcopy [printed versions](#) of the JOD manual.

An updated PDF version of the JOD manual is available [here](#). For more see [The JOD Page](#).

Playing the Blog hit game

Posted: 10 Jul 2012 03:39:06

On June 5th 2012 my little blog set an all time hit record: 198 robots, spammers and readers incremented my counters. 198 hits would be embarrassing for a major blog like [Instapundit](#) but for [Analyze the Data not the Drivel](#) it was a “[hitnotic](#)” day. I always attribute my triumphs to my utter manly awesomeness but I had to ask; *was anything else going on June 5th, 2012? Nothing much except the last transit of Venus in this century!* The masses were searching for “transit” and hundreds landed on this [little entry](#) I wrote a few months ago.

It takes time for a blog post to burrow into cyberspace. Google and Bing are always prowling blog sites and will pick up new posts within minutes but it takes about two weeks before worldwide indexes are updated. Once a post is on search engines readers will find it and when they do it will meet one of these three fates.

1. *Nobody ever reads it again.* This is the fate of most of my posts. I have posts that my dog, if I had a dog, wouldn’t read. It’s too bad because some of my [finest lyrical unhinged rants](#) are my least read posts.
2. *It gets lots of hits followed by a quick return to few or none.* My popular posts follow this pattern. Now that the 2012 transit of Venus is history people will stop searching for it. Popular posts fade faster than [old Botox saturated actresses](#) so enjoy your hits *while they last!*
3. *It gets legs and keeps sucking in hits for weeks, months and years.* My normal traffic comes from half a dozen *leggy* postings. My *leggy-est* posting is an [Inception movie review](#) that I wrote almost two years ago; it’s still generating ten to twenty hits per week. *Its ok people nobody really got that movie.*

Finally, *the blog hit game is a long game*; you have to keep playing. The best sports analogy is golf. Golf is the world’s hardest game. The gap between a perfect round

of eighteen and what the best players are capable of is insurmountable. Nobody will ever shoot an honest eighteen. A [best ball](#) foursome of Buddha, Christ, Mohammad and the archangel Gabriel couldn't shoot an honest eighteen. The Sun exploding tomorrow is more likely than an honest eighteen. Golf sets a bar so high it will never be breached. Artists have similar bars. The perfect novel is impossible. The perfect song is impossible. The perfect sculpture is impossible and I dare say the perfect blog post is impossible but then *it's the impossibility of perfection that keeps things interesting*. Keep at it and the hits will come.

Writing Portable J addons

Posted: 23 Jul 2012 19:58:34

On July 24, 2012 I gave a short talk, *Writing Portable J addons*, at the [2012 J Conference](#) in Toronto Ontario. I try to avoid “[death by PowerPoint](#)” with my presentations. Take a peek at the following and see if I succeeded.



Click for PDF presentation

Executioners should be selected like jurors

Posted: 31 Jul 2012 00:16:00

Jonah Goldberg makes an excellent point in [his recent column](#) about how the media always exploits shooting sprees to push for gun control but seldom asks — *what should we do with mass murders?* To my right-wingy, death-beasty, vengeance-seeking, cowboy mind [James Holmes](#), the Colorado Dark Knight Rises cinema shooter, is a perfect candidate for the death penalty. Let's review the facts.

1. **Is James guilty beyond any reasonable doubt?** Hell fucking yes! There is absolutely no doubt this little shithead is guiltier than sin. He is so fucking guilty that even a battalion of lawyers couldn't prove otherwise.
2. **Is James mentally competent?** Here tiny lawyer brains will attempt to argue that poor little James is obviously mentally ill because he killed all those innocent people and only mentally ill people kill people. It's tautological drivel like this that's destroyed whatever esteem lawyers once had. It's a pathetic argument but let's play anyway. Was Caesar mentally ill when he came saw and conquered? Was Truman mentally ill when he decided to nuke Hiroshima? I hold that choosing to kill any number of people, either directly or indirectly, is not, ipso facto, proof of mental illness. We don't live in a [Kumbaya](#) universe people! Sometimes there are excellent reasons for killing people and, more often than not, murders know exactly what they are doing. James is mentally competent. He carefully, logically and methodically executed his murderous spree.
3. **Was the act premeditated?** Duh — you don't booby trap your apartment or stockpile ammo by accident!

James scored a perfect trifecta; he's absolutely guilty, he knew what he was doing and he carefully planned his murders. Colorado is a death penalty state. *If James retires to a life of cable TV in prison that will be a miscarriage of justice!*

Coloradoans shouldn't worry another nanosecond about the fate of this piece-of-shit. They should be lining up to execute him which brings me to my one problem with the death penalty. If you are unable to kill someone you shouldn't expect others to do it for you. Our current system of *humane execution*, (talk about oxymoronic bullshit), by professional executioners is absurd. It shields society from the consequences of their laws and beliefs and it grants too much power to the state. Life and death belongs in the people's hands. We should select executioners like we select jurors. Maybe if we had to pull the trigger, throw the switch, or swing the head removing axe ourselves we might decide we don't like the death penalty. I know many death penalty opponents think that's the case but it's also possible that we might like it even more. I could easily bludgeon poor James to death hence I can abide the death penalty. Can You?

[Where's the Olympic beach?](#)

Posted: 09 Aug 2012 19:16:54

Readers of this blog know that I [do not approve of the Olympics](#). What started out as an eccentric bit of 19th century [classics nostalgia](#) has morphed into the expensive, corrupt, drug fueled, real-estate orgy we endure today. Whatever athletic ideals the Olympic movement espoused died on national and corporate altars decades ago. By the time the first national anthem sounds the real gold has long since traded hands. It's disappeared into offshore accounts, kick-back schemes, hidden payoffs and good old-fashioned high roller whoring. Despite the waste, drugs and corruption the public still bends over and begs flaccid [IOC](#) sodomites for more because *only the Olympics decides pressing issues like who can best tumble on a mat and catch a ribbon!* What's wrong with you people?

My normal Olympic reflex is to head for the hills and ignore the damn circus. In 2008 I was deep in cell phone blocking redwood forests so I didn't hear a peep about the Olympics. This year I'm not so lucky. Work and family obligations have kept me firmly locked in the Olympic vise. On my own I would change channels or read but I'm not on my own. My wife enjoys the games and her elderly demented mother enjoys them even more.

Dementia and the Olympics are perfect for each other! Last night while watching women's beach volleyball my mother in-law complained about the game's chief virtue: bikinis on tight female bodies. She wanted to know why these women were so shamefully dressed. My wife calmly explained that they were playing a game that's normally played on the beach. "Where is the beach?" my mother in-law retorted. Indeed, where is the beach? It's a perfect metaphor for the billions flushed down the Olympic sewer: connected cronies get rich, the proles ogle some fine ass and the taxpayer doesn't even get a real beach to pound sand on! Again, what's wrong with you people?

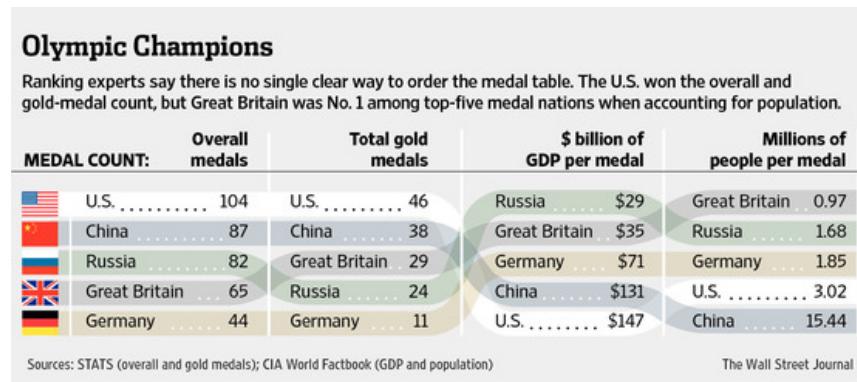


Click for more beach volleyball butts.

[Bankrupt Nation Wins the Olympics](#)

Posted: 13 Aug 2012 01:21:58

Thanks to the all squiggling [FSM](#) it's *finally* over! We, (citizens of the USA for the rest of you losers), have triumphed! We crushed those upstart crony Chinese communists, smothered our long-standing Russian adversaries and overwhelmed our cocky British hosts. All that remains is to hear the sweet loser chanting about how it's not about medals, or countries, or even wining and losing: what utter horseshit! *The entire obscenely overpriced Olympic spectacle is just one giant primate chest thump.* Today we get to pound our chests, bang the lower ranked females and crap all over the forest floor. God I detest the Olympics.



Final 2012 Olympic Medal Count

Let's look at the *our* triumph from another point of view. The USA is currently running a yearly deficit of 1.27 trillion dollars. Our acknowledged debt is 15.92 trillion dollars. Our unfunded liabilities exceed 120.13 trillion dollars. If you want to depress yourself just load up the [Debt Clock](#) and watch the numbers tick inexorably up and up. In short we are completely and thoroughly broke. Dividing the USA medal count into these numbers yields:

1. Price per medal vs. yearly deficit: 12.18 billion dollars.
2. Price per medal vs. acknowledged debt: 153.08 billion dollars
3. Price per medal vs. unfunded liabilities: 1.15 trillion dollars.

Yeah, we're big winners when it comes to piling up debt! I'd happily trade all our medals to balance the budget. Hell, I'd give up *all* American medals from all Olympic games to balance the budget. Now I'm sure many American athletes will object to this deficit reduction plan. Perhaps with all the stress of training, surreptitious doping and getting strangers to pee in bottles they missed the [transcendent One's](#) memo: "You didn't win that medal, someone else won that!"

Faith a guilty pleasure

Posted: 02 Sep 2012 23:47:02



It's a quiet Labor Day weekend in the *drivel dome*⁶ and your fearless reporter is a tad bored. I could help with the housework or get out and exercise but I have better things to do. Last night while trolling the [intertubes](#) for something to watch on [Hulu](#) I came across a transcendentally awesome Korean TV series called [Faith](#). I know what you're thinking. I haven't fallen off the skeptical horse. I'm still the same old judgmental know-it-all bombastic boomer asshole you've come to know and love. The series *Faith* has, as far as I can tell after many long hours of couch research, nothing to do with religious faith. This is one of the many reasons I adore this show.

Faith is basically another Asian martial arts epic. After the demise of the demigod Bruce Lee it's been mandatory for Asians residing east of Himalayas and south of Siberia to work martial arts into the plot whether it makes any damn sense or not. The Chinese, Koreans, Japanese, Vietnamese and other East Asians all follow Bruce's mandate with various spins. Naturally, the most odious and predictable martial spins come from the mainland Chinese. With few exceptions mainland martial arts goes something like this.

Evil plots are afoot that are threatening the unity of the homeland. Nefarious forces, mostly internal, sometimes external, are plotting to bring down the well-ordered Middle Kingdom. A charismatic badass plans to exploit disunity, dishonor the people and shit all over the ancestors. Something must be done! The ruler, usually a wise emperor, or a really hot empress, tasks some typically reluctant super warrior to off the badass. The super warrior may have ambivalent feelings about the current ruler but never about the homeland. Sure the current ruler is a decadent pussy boy with weak Kung Fu and that's too bad for *him* but damn, the country is not going down on my super warrior watch. Predictable mayhem ensues, bodies pile up, evil almost triumphs, gloats too much, and then falls to a combination of super warrior martial arts and old-fashioned hubris. In the end the homeland is saved and the closing credits suggest the super warrior *might* get some serious tail. I find it interesting that Hollywood is constantly destroying western civilization while mainland Chinese films forcefully reiterate that the homeland will always abide. I think it's safe to say there hasn't been an original mainland Chinese martial arts film since Bruce's glory days.

⁶ *Analyze the Data not the Drivel* is not suitable for succinct self-deprecating self-reference.

Thankfully the South Koreans are not like mainland Chinese. Without the burden of an oppressive humorless government forever threatening serious consequences for plot *wrong-think* South Koreans can show some humor and originality. Faith is an excellent example. We know right away this is not standard martial arts because the bad guys are mainland Chinese threatening to overrun little Korea. Even odder, our hero and heroine are the oddest of couples. He's a tall 14th century *ultra-ninja-oid* that can shoot lightning bolts from his hands while she is a ditsy 21st century plastic surgeon. It's your basic boy meets time wormhole meets girl story. Faith only gets better after the hero drags the ditsy surgeon back to the 14th century. The result is a comical martial arts chick-flicky self parodying guilty pleasure. You can see the cast members thinking **WTF** between their lines and is there a better endorsement than that?

Pandoc based J Syntax Highlighting

Posted: 21 Sep 2012 04:30:58

John MacFarlane's excellent command line utility [Pandoc](#) is a Haskell program that converts to and from various [text markup languages](#). Pandoc's help option lists its supported input and output formats.

The following examples are Linux bash shell commands. Windows shell commands are identical.

```
$ pandoc --help
pandoc [OPTIONS] [FILES]
Input formats: native, json, markdown, markdown+lhs, rst, rst+lhs, docbook,
                textile, html, latex, latex+lhs
Output formats: native, json, html, html5, html+lhs, html5+lhs, s5, slidify,
                 slideous, dzslides, docbook, opendocument, latex, latex+lhs,
                 beamer, beamer+lhs, context, texinfo, man, markdown,
                 markdown+lhs, plain, rst, rst+lhs, mediawiki, textile, rtf,
                 org, asciidoc, odt, docx, epub
```

Some Pandoc conversions are better than others. Pandoc does a better job of turning [markdown](#) into [L^AT_EX](#) than [L^AT_EX](#) into markdown. It's also better at converting HTML into [L^AT_EX](#) than [L^AT_EX](#) into HTML. Pandoc works best when converting markdown, the simplest of its inputs, to other formats. In fact Pandoc does such a good job of converting markdown to HTML, HTML+[MathJax](#), [L^AT_EX](#) or PDF that many writers are now saving their source documents as markdown text knowing they can easily produce other formats as needed.

As handy as Pandoc's markup conversions are this nifty tool also supports syntax highlighting for over a hundred programming languages. Unfortunately, my favorite language J is not on Pandoc's list of highlighted languages.⁷ Where have I run into this problem before? Luckily for me pandoc is an open source tool and Pandoc's author has made it easy to add new highlight languages.

Pandoc is a Haskell program. I've been aware of Haskell's existence for years but until I decided to take on this specialized Pandoc hack I had never studied or used the language. Usually when you set out to modify a large program in an unfamiliar programming language you're in for what can only be described as an *f'ing educational experience*. It's a testament to the quality of the Haskell's global libraries and standard tools that a complete Haskell novice can effectively tweak large Haskell programs. Here's what you have to do.

1. Install the [Haskell Platform](#). The Haskell Platform is available for all the usual suspects. I've used both the Windows and Linux versions. I almost installed the Mac version on my wife's Mac but resisted the urge.
2. [Get with the Cabal](#). Cabal is the main Haskell package distribution and build utility. Cabal comes with the Haskell Platform and is easily accessed from the command line. Type `cabal --help` in your favorite shell to view the program's options.
3. Spend sometime playing with [Hackage](#). Hackage contains a large set of Haskell packages including all the source code required to build Pandoc.

After installing the Haskell Platform and familiarizing yourself with Cabal try building Pandoc. This will thoroughly exercise your Haskell system. Instructions for building Haskell packages are [here](#). After reading the package build instructions run the following in your command shell:

```
$ cabal update  
$ cabal install pandoc
```

This will download, compile and install a number of Haskell packages. Where Cabal puts the packages depends on your operating system. Cabal saves Linux packages in a hidden local directory. On my machine they ended up in:

```
/home/john/.cabal/lib
```

⁷J has its own syntax highlighting tools but they are not part of a document generation system. Pandoc's highlighters elegantly feed into many output formats making them far more useful.

If you managed to build Pandoc you're now ready to add a new highlighting language. Pandoc uses the `highlighting-kate` package for highlighting. `highlighting-kate` works by reading a directory of `Kate` editor xml language regex based definition files and generating custom language parsers. We want to generate a custom J parser so we need to download `highlighting-kate` source and add a Kate xml definition file for J.

You can find such a J Kate file on the J Wiki [here](#). Download this file by cutting and pasting and save it as `j.xml`. Now do the following.

1. Run the Pandoc version command `pandoc --version` of the Pandoc you just built to determine the version of the `highlighting-kate` package you need.
2. Use Cabal to unpack the required `highlighting-kate` package. This downloads the required package and creates a temporary subdirectory in your current directory that contains package source code.

```
$ cabal unpack highlighting-kate-0.5.3.2
Unpacking to highlighting-kate-0.5.3.2/
```

3. Move into the temporary subdirectory and copy the Kate `j.xml` file to the package's xml subdirectory.

```
$ cd highlighting-kate-0.5.3.2
$ cp ~/pd/blog/j.xml ~/temp/highlighting-kate-0.5.3.2/xml/j.xml
```

4. Configure the package.

```
$ cabal configure
Resolving dependencies...
Configuring highlighting-kate-0.5.3.2...
```

5. Build the `highlighting-kate` package.

```
$ cabal build
Resolving dependencies...
... (omitted) ...
```

6. If `highlighting-kate` builds without problems run the command.

```
$ runhaskell ParseSyntaxFiles.hs xml
Writing Text/Highlighting/Kate/Syntax/SqlPostgresql.hs
Writing Text/Highlighting/Kate/Syntax/Scala.hs
```

```
... (omitted) ...
```

`ParseSyntaxFiles` scans the package's xml subdirectory and generates language specific parsers. If all goes well you will find `J.hs` in this directory.

```
~/temp/highlighting-kate-0.5.3.2/Text/Highlighting/Kate/Syntax
```

`J.hs`, like all the files referred to in this post, are available in the files sidebar in the [Haskell/Pandoc](#) subdirectory.

7. Now rebuild the `highlighting-kate` package. This compiles your new `J.hs` parser.

```
$ cabal build
Resolving dependencies...
... (omitted) ...
```

8. After rebuilding the package run the Cabal copy command to put the modified package in the expected library location.

```
$ cabal copy
Installing library in
/home/john/.cabal/lib/highlighting-kate-0.5.3.2/ghc-7.4.1
```

Now that the highlighting library is up to date we have to rebuild Pandoc. To do this mirror the steps taken to download and build the highlighting package.

1. Use Cabal to unpack the Pandoc package.

```
$ cd ~/temp
$ cabal unpack pandoc-1.9.4.2
Unpacking to pandoc-1.9.4.2/
```

2. Switch to the Pandoc subdirectory and configure the package.

```
$ cabal configure
Resolving dependencies...
[1 of 1] Compiling Main      ( Setup.hs, dist/setup/Main.o )
... (omitted) ...
```

3. Rebuild Pandoc.



Bonebridge puzzle in [MYST IV](#). The highlighted J verb `bonebridge` generates all “likely” lock combinations. Click for a MYST “Haven Age” walk-through.

```
$ cabal build
Building pandoc-1.9.4.2...
Preprocessing executable 'pandoc' for pandoc-1.9.4.2...
... (omitted) ...
```

If all goes well a Pandoc executable will be written to this subdirectory.

```
~/temp/pandoc-1.9.4.2/dist/build/pandoc
```

4. You can check the new executable by running `pandoc --version`. The result should display J in the list of supported languages.

Now that we have a Pandoc that can highlight J we’re almost ready to blog gaudy J code. However before doing this we need to install some custom [CSS](#). Custom CSS is not available on free *WordPress.com* blogs. To apply custom coloring schemes get the [custom package](#) and learn how to use WordPress’s custom CSS editor. As daunting as this sounds it’s [no probelmo](#) for my limited purposes. To enable tango style pandoc syntax highlighting on your WordPress blog paste [tango.css](#) into the custom CSS editor, check the “Add my CSS to CSS stylesheet” button and the press the “Save Stylesheet” button. Now your WordPress blog will be sensitive to the HTML span tags generated by Pandoc.

To show that all this hacking works as intended you can check out the Pandoc generated versions of this blog post. I’ve posted the original [markdown source](#) with [PDF](#), [LaTeX](#) and [HTML](#) versions. All these files are available via the files sidebar. You can generate the HTML version with the command:

```
$ pandoc -s --highlight-style=tango PJHighlight.markdown -o PJHighlight.html
```

To get other versions simply change the file extension of the output `-o` file.

Finally we are ready to post syntax highlighted J code. The following J verb

`bonebridge` generates all “likely” lock combinations for the **MYST IV** Bonebridge puzzle in Pandoc’s tango style. At one time I was a big fan of MYST computer games. I always enjoyed being lost in a beautiful puzzle which, if you discard the *beautiful* bit, is a pretty accurate description of my programmer day job.

```
bonebridge=:3 : 0

NB.*bonebridge v-- lists totem symbol permutations for bone
NB. bridge.

NB.

NB. The solution to this MYST IV puzzle is similiar to the book
NB. shelf puzzle in Tomanha but requires far more exploration of
NB. the age.

NB.

NB. You are confronted with 5 bones on the lock. All the bones
NB. move independently. You can see the settings for 4 bones. One
NB. bone has a broken display. The four visible bones have 8
NB. symbols on them in the same order. The 5th bone also has 8
NB. symbols and you can "safely" infer they are in the same order
NB. as the visible bones.

NB.

NB. Four bone symbols match symbols found on totem poles
NB. distributed around the age. There is a 5th totem pole but
NB. fruit eating mangrees obscure the totem symbol and I have
NB. never seen it. The totem poles are associated with age
NB. animals. In addition to the totem poles there is a chart in
NB. the mangree observation hut that displays a triangular
NB. pattern of paw prints. The paw prints define an animal
NB. ordering. The order seems to be how dangerous a particular
NB. animal is; big scary animals are at the top and vegetarians
NB. are at the bottom.

NB.

NB. Putting the clues together you infer:

NB.

NB. a) the bridge combination is some permutation of five
NB. different symbols

NB.

NB. b) two possible symbol orders are given by the paw chart

NB.

NB. c) you know 5 symbols and the 4th is one of the remaining 4
NB.
```

```

NB. If this is the case the number of possible lock settings
NB. shrinks from 32768 to the ones listed by this verb.
NB.
NB. monad: bonebridge uuIgnore
NB.
NB. bonebridge 0

NB. known in paw order
known=. s: ' square triangle hourglass yingyang'
unknown=. s: ' clover cross xx yy'

NB. all possible lock permutations
settings=. ~. 5 {"1 tapl known,unknown
assert. ((!8)%!8-5) = #settings

NB. possible ordering - we don't know
NB. what the fifth symbol is but it
NB. occurs in the 3rd slot
order=. 8#s:<'
order=. known (0 1 6 7} order
order=. unknown (2 3 4 5} order

NB. keep unknown only in 3rd slot
settings=. settings #~ -. +."/1 (0 1 3 4{"1 settings) e. unknown
settings=. settings #~ (2 {"1 settings) e. unknown

NB. strict row sequence adverb
srsm=. 1 : '*."/1 u/&> 2 <\1 y'

NB. retain strictly increasing and strictly decreasing rows
grade=. order i. settings
settings #~ ((< srsm)"1 grade) +. (> srsm)"1 grade
)

```

Semi-Literate JOD

Posted: 02 Oct 2012 04:08:52

Despite seven decades of programming experience documenting software remains a challenge. There are many reasons for this sorry state of affairs with the most



important being that programmers simply do not agree on the *need* for documentation. As pathetic as this sounds it's not without merit. It all depends on what you call "documentation."

Writing technical documents for management, marketing or users usually results in excruciating rounds of [Dilbertian](#) critiques. Everyone understands your code better than you do. If you provide too much detail, you get complaints. If you use unfamiliar words, you get complaints. If you point out limitations, assumptions or caveats, you get complaints. If you assume basic 8th grade reading levels, you get complaints. If you use nonstandard fonts or *unauthorized style templates*, you get complaints. No wonder many programmers hate "documentation" and blow off the entire problem by making ludicrous claims about "self documenting code." The self documenting cabal may have fooled management but they're not fooling the rest of us. The need for *illuminating* program documentation is as pressing today as it was for [ENIAC](#) coders in the 1940's and, when it comes to illuminating documentation, the best overall approach was pioneered by [Donald Knuth](#) over twenty-five years ago and goes by the moniker [literate programming](#).

Providing basic literate programming support in JOD has been on my to-do list for ages. I've held off until recently because I have never been happy with my [mark up](#) options. JOD directly supports simple J [scriptdoc](#) compatible leading comment block formatting. For example many of my J verbs start with a comment block like:

```
betweenstrs=:4 : 0

NB.*betweenstrs v-- select sublists between  nonnested delimiters
NB. discarding delimiters.

NB.

NB. dyad: blcl =. (clStart;clEnd) betweenstrs cl
NB.      blnl =. (nlStart;nlEnd) betweenstrs nl
NB.

NB.  cstr=. ;20#<'start yada yada end boo hoo start ahh end '
NB.  ('start';'end') betweenstrs cstr
NB.

NB.  NB. also applies to numeric delimiters
NB.  (1 1;2 2) betweenstrs 1 1 66 666 2 2 7 87 1 1 0 2 2

's e'=. x
llst=. ((-#s) (|.!..0) s E. y) +. e E. y
```

```

mask=. ~:/\ llst
(mask#llst) <;.1 mask#y
)

```

Even if you can't spell J I bet you have a good idea about what this "program" does and, if you doubt my claims, I've left you with some examples to try the next time you find yourself in J. Stupid comments may be for losers but telling comments, especially example laden ones, really help! And, if you really find comments distracting, JOD has a deal for you!

```

;1{compj 'betweenstrs'
betweenstrs=:4 :0
's e'=.x
a=.(~-#s )(|._!.0)s E.y)+.e E.y
b=.~:/\a
(b#a)<;.1 b#y
)

```

`compj` purges pesky comments and reduces tedious long identifiers like `mask` to pure compact J. Getting rid of comments is trivial, putting them back in: not so much! JOD's simple comment block formatting has been very effective but it's hardly literate programming.

Literate programming requires more muscle. Knuth used his own TeX. TeX and L^AT_EX are certainly up to the job, as are many HTML and XML approaches. Unfortunately, all these mark up formats suffer from "distracting taggyness." I can tolerate L^AT_EX but HTML and XML drives me nuts. Yes, there are perfectly fine editors for all these formats, but remember, we are inserting the resulting text into code that we will be looking at for the *rest of our miserable coding lives!* We need a mark up format that's stable, readable, versatile, easy to use and, *this is very important*, easy to ignore! [Markdown](#) is such a format. It's almost ideal for program comments and is capable of much more. I've started using markdown in JOD and it's already paying its way.

[jodliterate.ij](#)s is a J utility script that can generate *semi-literate* L^AT_EX documents directly from JOD groups. It uses a version of pandoc with J syntax highlighting, see [Pandoc based J Syntax Highlighting](#) for details. I consider `jodliterate` semi-literate because it's completely at the mercy of the programmer. If you don't store coherent markdown text fragments in JOD all you get is a nice syntax highlighted listing. But, if you actually *write* about your group, `jodliterate` can produce essential documents. [jodliterate.pdf](#) is an example of this tool being used on itself. Self reference always makes an excellent test case. `jodliterate` will be included in the next JOD release.

Until then you can download the J script from [this directory](#). As always referenced files are available in the files sidebar. Enjoy!

Election Reflections

Posted: 09 Nov 2012 23:17:59

About the only surprise coming out of the recent US election was [Puerto Rico's foolish vote to seek statehood](#). *People, you don't board the Titanic after it has hit the iceberg.* In time Puerto Ricans will learn what Quebec separatists have already painfully absorbed. If fence-sitting is your main tactic for extorting favors from larger entities stay on the goddamn fence. The minute you hop off the larger entity goes back to giving less than a crap about you. The [new independent senator from Maine](#) should pay attention. Nobody in the larger United States, or anywhere else for that matter, cares a whit about Maine. It only comes up in postcards featuring lighthouses. As a person from an even smaller state Montana, (yes tiny Maine has more people than Montana), I am not belittling you I'm merely pointing out that there aren't enough of you to tip elections one way or the other so the political establishment will not, can not, and never will give a fresh firm shit *unless you're in position to extract favors*. Sending a fence-sitter to the senate is smart politics but only if he stays on the fence! The people of Montana weren't smart enough to elect an independent and reelected a [garden variety Obama stooge](#). This only makes sense if you want to be ignored.

My Iranian born wife is a new American citizen and this was her first presidential election. She reliably cancelled my vote so the political establishment sucked a big goose egg out of our household. During the interminable election I kept reading about couples fighting about their partner's choice. Some went so far as to "misplace" ballots and get snotty about driving each other to the polls. In my naive, brain-dead youth, I used to swallow, "think not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country", hogwash. I really felt that my relationship with my country was vitally important, certainly more important than a possibly temporary spouse. People get divorced all the time but their countries abide. Well, not really, I'm a dual citizen; my wife holds three citizenships. Countries matter but if you don't value your wife or husband more than your country you're either in a bad marriage or you're a moron. In a few short years, when our [runaway fiscal train finally jumps the rails](#) and plunges into the abyss, a good spouse will be far more valuable than bankrupt government social programs. For lucky bastards like me that's already the case.

Git me a Hub'bery

Posted: 18 Nov 2012 23:51:38

Sometime ago I crossed my machine synchronization threshold. I routinely work on four operating systems, three laptops, a few servers, a bunch of phones and so on. I synchronized the directories I cared about while forming deep and rewarding relationships with file sharing services like [Dropbox](#). Dropbox is great but its success has attracted the attention of paranoid IT micromanagers and it's now frequently blocked on internal corporate networks. The be~~SOX~~ed imbeciles that set IT policies will not rest until it's impossible to do useful work on *corporate assets* and people wonder why there is so little return on IT investment.

Living without Dropbox and its many peers is annoying but tolerable provided humble USB ports are still useful but restricting plug-in drives is now ***standard not-operating procedure*** in most companies. So if you cannot share files or use USB what's left? Would you believe [GitHub](#)?

GitHub is close to total global dominance in the geeky code sharing world. I would not have expected a version control system to attract a fiercely loyal and dedicated cult following but it has. Linus Torvalds, the Linux demigod, started [Git](#) when he *correctly observed* that all pre-Git version control system were fundamentally flawed because they *enshrine the overlord peon hierarchy*. The overload, usually some IT nitwit, *manages* the entire code submission, review and backup process and the peons, that would be us, bend over take it. Until Git appeared the majority of programmers despised and detested version control. It was just more IT management bullshit. We put up with it because version control is a necessary evil and paychecks are even more necessary evil. We only wished things could be [less evil](#) and then Git appeared.

Git dumped the overlord peon hierarchy and adopted the radical notion that all repositories are created equal. When you synchronize Git repositories *everything is synchronized*. Your local copy contains everything the source does. This makes Git a superb peer-to-peer file distribution tool. Not only are you distributing files you're also distributing their complete histories. This, almost biological replication model, has resulted in an explosion of Git repositories and the rise of hub sites like GitHub. Git's dominance would not be possible if it was centrally managed. It's succeeded because it's harnessed market chaos.

I've used Git for over a year and I have often thought about pushing [JOD](#) source to public repositories. This weekend I bit the bullet and set up [public repositories](#). Now it's easy to [Git me a Hub'bery!](#)

JHS meets MathJax

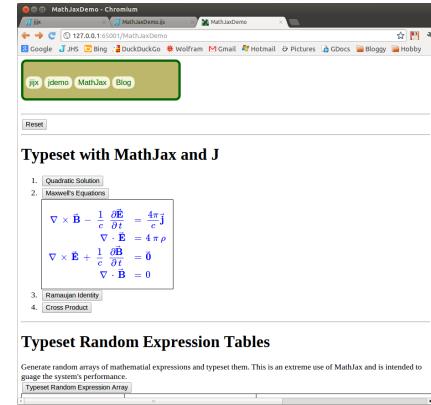
Posted: 25 Nov 2012 07:19:21

With the release of J 7.01 [Jsoftware](#) “deprecated” COM. J 6.02 can run as a [COM automation server](#) but J 7.01 cannot. Throwing COM under the bus is hardly radical. Microsoft, COM’s creator, has been holding COM’s head underwater for years. Many [.Net](#) programmers cringe when they hear the word “COM” and the greater non-windows⁸ world never *really* accepted it. COM is a complex, over-engineered, proprietary dead-end. Yet despite its bloated deficiencies a lot of useful software is COM based. So with COM going away, at least for J programmers, the hunt is on for viable replacements and while we’re hunting let’s rethink our entire approach to building J GUI applications.

J GUI applications are traditional desktop applications. They’re built on native GUIs like [Windows Forms](#) and [GTK](#) and when done well they look and act like GUI applications coded in other languages. This is all good but there is a fundamental problem with desktop GUIs. *There are many desktop GUIs and they do not travel well.* Programmers have spent many dollars and days creating so-called *cross-platform GUIs* but, if you wander off the Windows, Mac and Linux reservation, the results are not particularly portable. And, as portable GUIs rarely outperform native alternatives, programmers tend to stick in their tribal silos. GUI programming is a bitch, has always been a bitch and will always be a bitch. It’s time to divorce the desktop GUI bitch.

All divorces, even the geeky GUI variety, are hard. When you finally cut the knot you’re not entirely sure what you’re doing or where you’ll end up. All you know is that there is a better way and with respect to J GUI applications I believe that [JHS](#) is that way. JHS leverages the large CSS, HTML and JavaScript (CHJ) world and in recent years some impressive browser-based applications have emerged from that world. The application that changed my mind about JavaScript and browser-based applications in general is something called [MathJax](#).

⁸On a purely numerical basis there is no greater nonwindows world.



Screen shot of JHS MathJaxDemo running on Ubuntu

MathJax typesets mathematics. It renders both L^AT_EX and MathML using fully scalable browser fonts. This is better than what WordPress does. The following Ramanujan identity taken from [MathJax examples](#) renders on WordPress as an *image*.

$$\frac{1}{\left(\sqrt{\phi\sqrt{5}-\phi}\right)e^{\frac{2}{5}\pi}} = 1 + \frac{e^{-2\pi}}{1+\frac{e^{-4\pi}}{1+\frac{e^{-6\pi}}{1+\frac{e^{-8\pi}}{1+...}}}}$$

MathJax renders the same expression with scalable fonts and supports downloading the expression as L^AT_EX or MathML text. This is pretty impressive for browser JavaScript. I wondered how hard it would be to use MathJax with JHS and was pleased to find it's *easy peasy*.

Writing a basic JHS application is a straightforward task of setting up three JHS J nouns **HBS**, **CSS** and **JS**.⁹ **HBS** is a sequence of J sentences where each sentence yields valid HTML when executed. JHS generates a simple web page from **HBS** and returns it to the browser. **MathJaxDemo HBS** is:

```
HBS=: 0 : 0
navul ''
'<hr>','treset' jhb 'Reset'

'<hr>',jhh1 'Typeset with MathJax and J'
configjax
oltypeset ''

'<hr>',jhh1 'Typeset Random Expression Tables'
tabledesc
'<br/>','ttable' jhb'Typeset Random Expression Array'
'<br/>','restable' jhspan''
)
```

CSS is exactly what you expect: CSS style definitions. Finally, **JS** is application specific JavaScript. **MathJaxDemo JS** matches **HBS** page events with corresponding JHS server handlers. This demo uses [ajax](#) for all event handlers.

```
JS=: 0 : 0

function ev_ttable_click(){jdoajax([], "");}
function ev_tquad_click(){jdoajax([], "");}
function ev_tmaxwell_click(){jdoajax([], "");}
function ev_tramaujan_click(){jdoajax([], "");}
function ev_tcrossprod_click(){jdoajax([], "");}
```

⁹To learn about JHS programming study the JHS demos and the JHS browser application.

```

function ev_treset_click(){jdoajax([], "");}

function ev_ttable_click_ajax(ts){jbyid("restable").innerHTML=ts[0];
    MathJax.Hub.Typeset();}
function ev_tquad_click_ajax(ts){jbyid("resquad").innerHTML=ts[0];
    MathJax.Hub.Typeset();}
function ev_tmaxwell_click_ajax(ts){jbyid("resmaxwell").innerHTML=ts[0];
    MathJax.Hub.Typeset();}
function ev_tramaujan_click_ajax(ts){jbyid("resramaujan").innerHTML=ts[0];
    MathJax.Hub.Typeset();}
function ev_tcrossprod_click_ajax(ts){jbyid("rescrossprod").innerHTML=ts[0];
    MathJax.Hub.Typeset();}

function ev_treset_click_ajax(ts){
    jbyid("restable").innerHTML=ts[0]; jbyid("resquad").innerHTML=ts[0];
    jbyid("resmaxwell").innerHTML=ts[0]; jbyid("resramaujan").innerHTML=ts[0];
    jbyid("rescrossprod").innerHTML=ts[0];
}

```

Running the JHS `MathJaxDemo` is a simple matter of:

1. Downloading the J scripts in the `MathJaxDemo` folder to a local directory.
2. Editing J's `~config/folders.cfg` file and pointing to your download directory with the name `MathJaxDemo`. You are set up correctly if `jpath '~MathJaxDemo'` returns your path.
3. Loading the demo: `load '~MathJaxDemo/MathJaxDemo.ijs'`
4. Browsing to the site: `http://127.0.0.1:65001/MathJaxDemo`

It's not hard to use JHS as a general application web server. JHS provides many common controls right out of the box but to compete with desktop applications it's necessary to supplement JHS with JavaScript libraries like MathJax. In coming posts I will explore how to use industrial strength JavaScript grids and graphics with JHS.

Bill Lam has pointed out that J 7.01 can function as a COM client. The JAL addon tables/wdooo controls OpenOffice using Ole Automation which is one of the many manifestations of COM.

JHS with the DHTMLX Grid

Posted: 04 Dec 2012 05:27:15

Grids are the most important GUI user object. It's hard to think of a user-friendly data munching application that doesn't have a grid beating at its heart. Consequently, any serious *GUI interface contender* must support grids. My [previous post](#) showed how to use [MathJax](#) with [JHS](#). MathJax is an impressive and important JavaScript library; it clearly demonstrates the potential of CHJ¹⁰ GUI interfaces but let's face it, mathematical typesetting will not win many consulting contracts. Grids won't seal the deal either but their *absence* is a huge "next" signal. To support serious business and technical applications JHS needs grids.

Fortunately, the JavaScript world is [grid saturated](#). The difficulty is not finding a grid but choosing among dozens of candidates. For this demo I Googled around and found [DHTMLX](#). According to this [probably biased article](#) the DHTMLX grid performs well on large inputs and, more importantly, there is an [open source](#) version.

You have to start somewhere so I opted to use DHTMLX to build a simple CSV file editor. The CSV files I am going to edit are TAB delimited text files. Each file has a fixed number of columns with column names in the first row. Here is [an example](#) TAB delimited file. The idea is to load the file data into the grid. Tweak a few rows and save the result. By increasing the size of the CSV file we can gauge the performance of the grid. Let's get started.

Using the DHTMLX grid requires some preparation.

1. Create a local directory and edit J's `~config/folders.cfg` to reference the directory with the name `GridDemo`. `jpath '~GridDemo'` should return the full directory path.
2. Download the files in the [GridDemo](#) folder and copy them to `~GridDemo`.
3. Download the Standard Edition (Version 3.5) of [DHTMLX](#). The distribution file `dhtmlxGrid.zip` contains the grid source and supporting files.
4. Extract the `/dhtmlxGrid/codebase/` directory from `dhtmlxGrid.zip` and copy the entire directory tree to `~GridDemo`.
5. Also extract `/dhtmlxGrid/samples/common` from `dhtmlxGrid.zip` and copy the directory to `~GridDemo`.

When you're finished the top-level of `~GridDemo` will look like the following where names without extensions are directories.

¹⁰CSS, HTML and JavaScript.

```

calendar      dhtmlxgrid.js          GridDemo.ijx      t100rows.txt
common        dhtmlxgrid_skins.css   imgs            t5000rows.txt
dhtmlxcommon.js  excells           jodoval.png
dhtmlxgridcell.js ext             skins
dhtmlxgrid.css   favicon.ico       t1000rows.txt

```

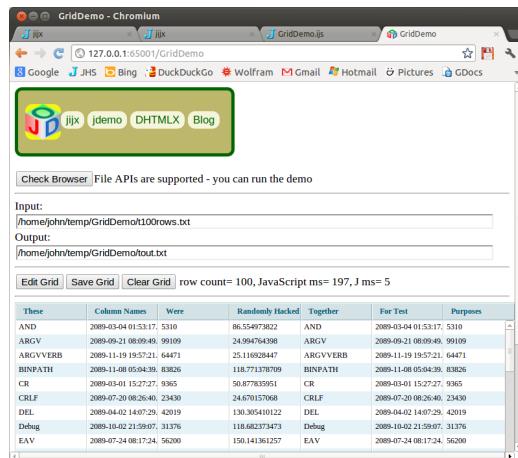
The main J script is `~GridDemo\GridDemo.ijx`. Start JHS and load this file.

```
load '~GridDemo/GridDemo.ijx'
```

Then browse to this site.

```
http://127.0.0.1:65001/GridDemo
```

If all goes well you will see the following `GridDemo` page after pressing the `Edit Grid` button.



Screenshot of GridDemo running on Chrome

To load and edit files enter their fully qualified names in the `Input` and `Output` boxes and press `Edit Grid`. To edit a cell double-click it. To save changes press `Save Grid`.¹¹ There are more sophisticated ways to pick files on JavaScript pages. It's easy to pop up standard host OS file dialogs but it's not particularly easy to determine host directory paths. [This post](#) outlines the demons web programmers must slay to select host files. JHS circumvents these difficulties by asking the J server, which is a

¹¹The freebie version of DHTMLX does not support grid serialization. [Here is how to roll your own.](#)

typically a *local console process*, to do the dirty work. JavaScript's access to local files is limited for security reasons but J has no such restrictions. [Use the force Luke!](#)

Three test files `t100rows.txt`, `t1000rows.txt`, and `t5000rows.txt` are included with the demo. On my test machines load times vary from fractions of a second for the smaller files to nine seconds for the largest. This is competitive with the basic `c#` grid control and fast enough for serious work.

In subsequent posts I will explore JavaScript/JHS graphics options and start the process of integrating, grids, graphs and MathJax with JHS.

More about JHS with the DHTMLX Grid

Posted: 05 Dec 2012 04:22:50

I have resolved my [DHTMLX standard edition](#) row data extraction problem. The standard edition does not serialize grids or track user cell changes. You have to pay for such luxuries. Because I'm a [foul software Grinch](#) and this is just an exploratory hack I had to roll my own. I am posting the relevant JavaScript because I could not find similar examples. Here is how you can fetch rows from standard edition DHTMLX grids and save them as JSON in a hidden `textarea` element. Eric Iverson suggested hidden `textareas` and they work like a charm.

```
function ev_saveme_click(){

    if ('undefined' != typeof grid0){

        if (0 == grid0.getRowsNum()){
            jbyid("rerowcnt").innerHTML = "No rows to save";
            return;
        }

        var st = new Date().getTime(), // start time
            ids = grid0.getAllRowIds(","),
            ccnt = 1 + grid0.getColumnsNum(); // includes id

        ids = ids.split(",");
        var rcnt = ids.length,
            tab = new Array(rcnt);

        // header row - tab[0][0] cell ignored
        tab[0] = new Array(ccnt);
```

```

for (var i = 1; i < ccnt; i++) {
    tab[0][i] = grid0.getColumnLabel(i-1,0);
}

// cells with leading row id
for (var i = 0 , si = 1 ; i < rcnt; i++ , si++) {
    tab[si] = new Array(ccnt);
    for (var j = 1; j < ccnt; j++) {
        tab[si][j] = grid0.cells((+ids[i]),j-1).getValue();
    }
    tab[si][0] = ids[i];
}

// prefix row column counts
var pfx = (rcnt+1) + " " + ccnt + "*";
jbyid("gridchgs").innerHTML = pfx + JSON.stringify(tab);
jdoajax(["gridchgs","tout"], "");

var et = new Date().getTime() - st; // end time
jbyid("rerowcnt").innerHTML= " row count= " + grid0.getRowsNum() +
    ", JavaScript ms= " + et;

} else {
    jbyid("rerowcnt").innerHTML= "Nothing to save";
}
}

```

Passing data back to J is fast but the J JSON addon `convert\json` burps on large datasets. For this demo I substituted a simple table oriented parser that is much faster.

King Hobbit Kong

Posted: 16 Dec 2012 22:24:06

The pre-Hobbit hum was not harmonious. It started with the [interminable legal battle](#) over who would direct the Hobbit and how to split any spoils. After Peter Jackson's cinematic Lord of the Rings triumph people assumed he would be The Hobbit guy but an envious and embittered clique of Tolkien's heirs felt they weren't getting enough for their stuff and filed suit demanding more. For some reason the spoiled progeny of the famous and accomplished think they're entitled to feed on

their glorious ancestor's corpse — oops estate — forever. We've seen enough of this in the US with the idiot Kennedy clan: none of whom I would trust to [drive](#) or [fly](#) me anywhere. Even white-bread, holier than thou Canada, cannot shake this affliction. Look at [Justin Trudeau](#) — living on his father's fame and full of it right up to his naturally curly eyebrows. Go back far enough and we all have glorious ancestors; unfortunately, this entitles us to *precisely squat* which, in a just universe, would constitute the sum total of royalties due to the current parasitic Tolkien generation.

Once the legalities settled and Jackson got control of the project ominous stories started swirling about "changes" to The Hobbit. One particularly disturbing rumor had Legolas making an appearance. Funny, I've read the Hobbit twice and *missed him in the book!* Whenever people start "improving classics" I get very wary. I'm sure the Hobbit screen writers are very smart and capable but they haven't written a literary classic. If Legolas shows his pointy little ears in The Hobbit they should put bags over their heads and go into hiding *for their own safety.*

After the legalities and plot rumors the [technology](#) of The Hobbit made news. The Hobbit was shot at 48 frames per second: twice the standard rate. This was allegedly done to improve 3D projection. The biggest complaint about 3D movies, *other than that they are 3D movies*, is that they're dim and fuzzy. Why this surprises anyone astonishes me. Hey, I've got an idea, let's watch our three hundred million dollar movie through cheap, dark, optically flawed, polarized, throw-away plastic glasses. What could go wrong? The stupidity of hollywood weirdos is boundless but what do you expect from [Obama worshippers](#). It's been claimed that 48 frames per seconds allows 3D projectors to present 24 frames per second to each eye and increase projection brightness, compensating for the those cheap dark glasses, without introducing an annoying flicker that plagues lower frame rates. We shall soon see if this is the case or just more Hollywood bullshit. Still, it would have been nice to test this technology on [standard cinematic crap](#) before subjecting classics to it.

Finally, if all of the above wasn't enough, The Hobbit, by far the shortest of the famous Tolkien books, is being split into two, maybe three films, with the first installment running around three freaking hours. Wasn't Jackson the guy that took a short, tight, beloved film classic, the [original King Kong](#), and blew it up into a gigantic, tedious, overwrought, hemorrhoid inducing bore that was gutted in less than ten seconds by [Robot Chicken!](#) Yes the pre-Hobbit hum was not harmonious so I wasn't expecting much when I plopped my discerning ass in my cinema seat and braced for The Hobbit.

Then three hours passed.

So what's the verdict? I'll try to do this without profanity. First a few warnings:

1. If you have read and enjoyed The Lord of the Rings but haven't read the Hobbit **do not see this film until you have read the book!** The book will not spoil the film but the film will spoil the book.
2. If you're a parent, looking to entertain your sucrose saturated children over the holidays, and you take them to The Hobbit, *before they get a chance to read the book*, you might as well go whole hog and tell them, there's no Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny does not lay hardboiled colored eggs, the Tooth Fairy is mom and dad and little children don't go to an imaginary heaven when they die; they're just dead.

With that out-of-the-way I will publicly confess to enjoying the film labeled "The Hobbit." Yes, my worst fears materialized on an epic scale. This is not, "The Hobbit," but rather Hobbit inspired. So many artistic liberties were taken that I predict a rash of [Hobbit, or not Hobbit](#), critiques will flood the [intertubes](#). The story unfolds with a leaden, worst camping trip ever, pace and even the best scene in the movie, when Bilbo wins his riddle contest with Gollum and makes off with "the precious" ring is tedious. The famous *time* riddle comes across as a mood-lighting lighting aside and is so far removed from the brilliance of the book that it would have been better to just omit it, but you could say the same for at least half the scenes in this movie.

As I left the cinema surrounded by subdued teenagers, many of whom where commenting on how, "that wasn't like the book," I wondered who is this film for? Then it hit me. This is for the fantasy role-playing video game crowd. Many kids spend days immersed in these games. They're used to laconic meandering pointless plot lines. This demographic will find The Hobbit tight, on plot, and will delight in the impressive special effects. Smaug does have beautiful eyes and I really enjoyed the wood trolls. I would have *positively loved* this film if the trolls had eaten the dwarves on the spot and then followed it up with a celebrity chef panel discussion. Maybe we'll get lucky in Hobbit 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7,

[Apocalypse Never or I Told You So Day](#)

Posted: 21 Dec 2012 16:45:49

Let's begin with an apology to the Mayan's. There's not a whit of verified historical evidence that the ancient Mayans predicted the end of the world or that they were any more upset about cycles in their calendars than we are in ours. Modern Mayans



You've burnt the plot and added ingredients that the recipe didn't call for. This isn't Hobbit stew and you call yourself a chef.

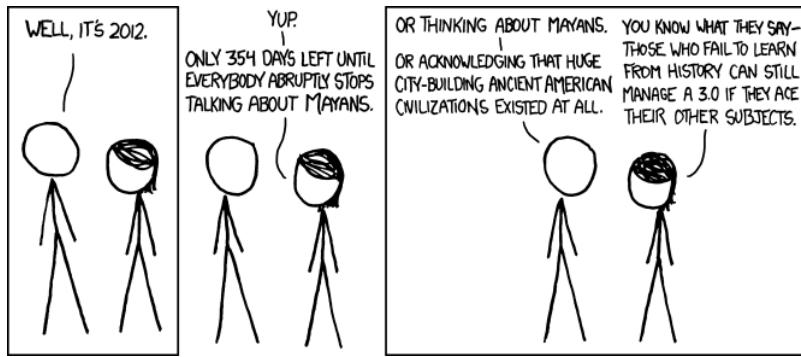
repeatedly [pointed this out](#) but arguing with new age morons, schizophrenic doom mongers and pure outright rapacious hucksters is a thankless task. Crazy ideas are easy to market. Just look at who we vote for, the consumer crap that fills our homes, the twaddle that we ludicrously label news and the sheer reams of reason suffocating rubbish that infuses the very core of our increasingly derelict civilization. Believe me; I completely understand the hygienic appeal of apocalypse. A clean, moron free, slate: oh what a glorious day that would be!

Well, it's not the end of the world but it's still a glorious day because the day after the world ends is when skeptics celebrate global ***I told You So Day***. On I told you so day sane and rational people get to rub it in and remind delusional nitwits everywhere that they've been suckered again. My only regret is I told you so day requires a degree of sanity among the insane. Anyone that fell for Mayan doomsday drivel is now rapidly forgetting it and the very craziness that abetted the belief is now rapidly erasing it. Genuinely crazy people aren't rational enough to recognize their errors making them poor I told you so targets. As for hucksters: they're already working the next scam. Skeptics just [can't get no satisfaction!](#)

Let's Trade Constitutional Amendments

Posted: 24 Dec 2012 22:28:45

I'm a big fan of stark choices. Stark choices push trivialities aside, expose underlying problems and bring hidden motivations to light. There is nothing more satisfying than watching well nursed notions self-destruct when reduced to stark choices. Here's a stark choice our corrupt ruling class will never put on ballots, or discuss, or dare



XKCD is the best skeptical cartoonist working the intertubes these days. Click for more.

mention.

We can continue riding our gun-toting financial train wreck or we can repeal the Second Amendment, the right to bear arms, and substitute a Balanced Budget Amendment in its place.

Citizens lose the right to bear arms and government loses the right to borrow and print money. To my tiny programmer brain this seems like a completely [fair trade](#). The Second Amendment was never about creating a safe cozy society. It was all about safe-guarding liberty; it still is. Today, the biggest threat to the liberty of Americans is our own government. If it was cut down to a fiscally sustainable size the need for firearms, to shoot the bastards in DC, would dramatically subside and then all of us, left, right, [up, down, top and strange](#) could join hands for one big happy [Kumbaya-a-thon](#).

Yeah I didn't think so.

Still it's fun to play these mind games. If by some miracle, and I'm talking Red Sea parting here, my amendment swap ever got serious consideration, it would be amusing to watch the partisan cockroaches¹² run for cover.

For the left the primacy of the state is everything. Gun control is far more about control than it is about guns and public safety. Faced with the dramatic curtailment of largely wasteful government social programs, a logical consequence of balanced budgets, your typical lefty would happily accept one, two, three, maybe more kindergarten

¹²My apologies to cockroaches. You are fine upstanding arthropods while political partisans barely reach the level of toxic waste.

massacres per year to keep their beloved entitlements flowing.

As for the gun rights crowd: many of them clamor for balanced budgets but I suspect many would go all, “deficits don’t matter,” if they had to cough up their beloved 9mm pistols, sawed off shotguns and AR-15’s.

There is very little intellectual honesty or creativity on either side of this debate and I’m tired of it. If we don’t fall off the damn fiscal cliff I’m going to push your dumb asses over it. Have a merry freaking Christmas and a less miserable New Year!

Books to Ignore

Posted: 27 Dec 2012 23:31:03

My superpower is indifference. Indifference is the soporific that lets my inner beast nap in peace. Without it I would have long since turned into a murdering psychopath, but I remain calm, rational, nearly ethereal, as I proudly ignore the unhinged idiocy of my fellow human beings. I prize my detachment, my don’t-give-a-shit-ness, my lordly disdain, and I work hard to maintain it. Today I’m sharing one of my, how to resist pummeling the morons around you, secrets. Here it is: *don’t read rubbish*.

Now, don’t fire up your [book Barbie](#); that’s not what I’m suggesting. I’m asking you to upgrade your standards and scoot past toxic aisles in your favorite book store. Ignorable books are legion and they’re relatively easy to identify. The following rules have served me well.

1. **Do not read biographies of living people.** There are few, if any, definitive biographies of the living for the simple reason that they’re almost impossible to write without triggering crippling law suits. Historical figures, and their entire sycophantic bottom-feeding cohort, must be long dead before anything approaching perspective is possible. So put down that [Prince of Wales](#) or, don’t make me puke, [Ted Turner](#), biography. They’re trash, worse than pornography, at least porn facilitates release.
2. **Do not read autobiographies.** Autobiographical fiction, and it always is, is akin to masturbating in public. Only one person is going to enjoy it. Everything I said about biographies goes double for autobiographies. We know you’re misleading, omitting, embellishing, polishing, fabricating, composting and just plain lying. If you’re one of the rare true worthies, say a [Fields Medalist](#), a hard science Nobel winner, a Caesar, or a Mark Twain then go ahead and indulge

yourself. Your scribbling's will show future generations that bullshit is the only human universal.

3. **Do not read hyphenated anything.** Only mediocre twaddle preens as black-history, feminist-politics, gay-literature, Indian-mathematics, lesbian-drama or aboriginal-stories; the good stuff is known as history, politics, literature, mathematics, drama and stories.
4. **Skip anything with “New Age” in its title, preamble, introduction, appendices or footnotes.** Virtually everything written about new age beliefs, medicine, philosophy and so on is complete and utter garbage. This dreck is for feeble, magical-thinking, childish minds. I genuinely pity the purveyors and swallows of new-age bilge; they’re sad silly people: come the zombie apocalypse the Deepak Copra’s of the world are starters.
5. **Eschew political diatribes written solely to exploit current events.** The political diatribe, or insta-history, like autobiographical fiction, may let readers in the future relive our self-deceptions, but we don’t live in the future. Most of these books emit a foul, *cash in on my 15 minutes of fame*, stench. I weep for the trees that died to print this crap.
6. **Ignore books that rehash thoroughly debunked cover-ups and conspiracies.** 9/11 was not an inside job, there are no miracle cancer cures, Bigfoot does not exist, the pyramids were not built by aliens, dowsing is crap, Oswald shot Kennedy, and the world did not end on December 21, 2012. Being a hard-ass skeptic clears entire drivel laden bookshelves.
7. **Do not read diet books.** You are not going to learn anything you don’t already know. We know why we’re fat. We eat too much and move to little. It’s really that simple. Get off you’re stupid obese ass and stop wasting your money on diet books.
8. **Do not read computer books with high screen-shot densities.** As a programmer I am constantly pawing through computer books and it pains me to report that vast swathes of this technical genre are awful. Stop printing one damn screen shot after another. It’s not helping.
9. **Ignore how to get rich books.** Get rich whores are worse than insta-history whores and often far more damaging to the pocketbooks of gullible readers.
10. **Give any book sharing Steve Job’s secrets a wide berth.** The necrophages writing this tripe are stunted little animals. Let’s feed on the dead,

rich, white guy. Maybe if we eat his soul we'll get rich too.

See that wasn't so bad. With these ten rules you, shrink big-box bookstores to manageable dimensions, speed up online searching, and cut your exposure to rage fomenting mental pollution. I must warn you that there are exceptions my rules and it delights me when I find them. If you can point to books that break my rules please drop a note. *I enjoy being wrong; it's an opportunity to learn something and it's a rare experience.*

2012 Blog Robot Review

Posted: 31 Dec 2012 15:36:11

The [WordPress.com](#) robots gave us an amusing end of year blog *attaboy*.



Click for bloggy goodness

Here's an excerpt:

600 people reached the top of Mt. Everest in 2012. This blog got about **11,000** views in 2012. If every person who reached the top of Mt. Everest viewed this blog, it would have taken 18 years to get that many views.

[Click here to see the complete report.](#)

2013

[Argentina or Australia](#)

Posted: 03 Jan 2013 05:42:18

We're planning a major trip for the fourth quarter of 2013. It's been over a decade since my wife and I last sojourned beyond North America so this year we're going to spend a few dollars, before the Obama economy reduces them to useless paper, and see more of the world. Two countries have long topped my must visit list: Argentina and Australia. I'm attracted to each for different reasons. We would like to visit both but resource constraints mandate one. So I thought I would ask you, dear readers, to help us make up our minds.

In Australia's favor, it's a large English-speaking country inhabited with unique flora and fauna. Who doesn't want to see many marauding marsupials?¹³ Visiting Australia would let me tick off another continent leaving one, Antarctica, to visit. I know getting around the country would be like a North American road trip and culture shock would be limited or non-existent. From the outside Australia seems like a warmer, drier and less polite¹⁴ version of Canada sans Quebec.

Spanish-speaking Argentina presents a few more cultural barriers, but in Argentina's favor, it has the [highest mountain](#) in both Americas, shares one of the [greatest waterfalls](#) on Earth, sports a great new world city, Buenos Aires, and is populated with people who have limited respect for their government. Disdain for the ruling class: it's a sure sign of an *enlightened people*.

On the basis of current events this is a no-brainer; Australia easily wins. Australia, like Canada, is a relatively competent and safe democratic state. But, on a darker note, and just like Canada, Australia is overrun with prattling lefties on the government's payroll. I see no serious ideological differences between the [CBC](#) and the [ABC](#). Australia, like Canada, still supports the anachronistic British crown, but in their favor, they're on the republican edge and if [Chuck](#), the idiot, becomes king they may finally cross over to the dark side.

Argentina's recent past is problematic. They provoked and lost a stupid Falkland sheep pasture war. They alternate between clueless Peronista cronies and second-

¹³Here in Missouri we often find dead opossums, members of the sole North American order of marsupials, on our highways.

¹⁴Canadians are too polite. Assholes won't learn if you don't call them assholes.

rate [fascists](#). You know your government is pathetic when Madonna makes [musicals](#) about it. The current [Kirchner government](#) is hopeless and is wrecking the country's finances at Zimbabwean speed. This is all bad, but taking a contrarian tack, Argentines have already [been there done that](#). When currency collapses and defaults are regular events people plan for them. Argentines have much to teach the world when it comes to ignoring, working around, and sabotaging the designs of our delusional masters. They know their government is incompetent, sometimes dangerous, and not be trusted — especially with money. In this regard they're light years ahead of Americans.¹⁵ Such chaos would scare off tourists in many parts of the world but nobody is raising red flags about Argentina; it's not Gaza or even, post Arab spring, Egypt.

So where should we go? We promise to weigh any hints or suggestions you leave. Click the following link for the first ever Analyze the Data not the Drivel poll.

[Should we visit Argentina or Australia?](#)

[My Dream of Liberty Encased](#)

Posted: 05 Jan 2013 05:31:35

I have cinematic dreams that I watch as a little sleeping movie critic. I'm sure you're familiar with this weird state of consciousness. You know you're asleep and dreaming; the dream is unfolding around you, but part of your mind, the part that knows you're dreaming, is aware and watching. It's busy taking notes, making snide remarks, lamenting poor production values and snickering at clichés. Sometimes it's surprised and delighted by unexpected turns. This morning I had an entertaining dream.

I was visiting the Statue of Liberty for the second time. I've seen the statue in my waking life and it is well worth the security shakedown you'll get before boarding the ferry at [Battery Park](#). In my dream I knew that many years had passed since my last visit and I was nervous about recent changes. As the ferry pulled up to the statue's island my concerns materialized. The entire island had been "redeveloped." The little park at the base of the statue was gone: replaced by a massive marble covered plaza. Standing in the middle of the plaza was a large, hideous, marble, glass and steel building that completely enclosed the statue. From the island boat dock you couldn't even see Liberty! "Oh crap," my dreaming self muttered. Large signs on the dock warned us about "demonstrative language." We were to conduct ourselves

¹⁵Don't worry, The One's inept regime is educating large numbers of Americans on the dangers of [out-of-control](#) finances. Soon Americans will join more enlightened nationalities, like Mexicans, in their contempt for government.

with quiet dignity while visiting this “shrine of democracy.” My dreaming self, and the little sleeping movie critic, both inwardly groaned. Nothing says “democracy” like shutting up and taking whatever’s doled out.

I got off the boat feeling hopeful; there had to be a good vantage point to look at Liberty. I was carrying my cameras, so I set off exploring the plaza looking for a good place to take pictures. The plaza was still under construction. Construction fencing blocked off the plaza behind the Liberty building. You couldn’t walk around the building, but you could go far enough to see that the walls were completely opaque on all sides except the front, where Liberty gazed at the harbor. Her back and sides were completely hidden and exceptionally thick steel girders buttressed the back wall. “That ought to block incoming planes,” my dream self thought. My little movie critic wasn’t happy. *Liberty is about open possibilities in all directions.* It’s not about being stuffed in a box and hidden from view. All my selves found it difficult to believe that some moron thought it was a good idea to completely cover the thing we were all there to see.

Determined to get a good picture, I turned back from the construction fence and walked along the base of the building. On the way I passed two little men dressed in black; they were staging a puppet show. Only the puppets weren’t little dolls on strings they were massive pantomime robots that towered over the tourists. The giant robots were exactly mimicking what the little men were doing. My somnolent movie critic thought, “Cute – the great men are really just little men putting on a big show. If you take away their puppets they’re even smaller and more pathetic than the rest of us.” I took a moment to congratulate my dreaming self for abruptly injecting this metaphor while also noting it was too blatant for refined tastes.

Leaving the puppeteers, I made my way to the front entrance of the building. It was like every visitor center you have ever entered. A fat black woman with bad breath patted me down and made me run my already checked camera bags through an x-ray scanner. I picked up my camera bags and wandered in the Liberty building until I found a dark series of escalators running up the front of the massive statue. I was suddenly happy. This must lead to a good viewpoint. I walked up the escalator steps fumbling with my camera bags. Immediately, in dream steps, I was at the top of the escalators. They discharged into a small dark brown room at the very top of Liberty. In the middle of the room, wrapped in museum display velvet, a bit of Liberty’s crown reflected dim halogen lights. Tourists were touching the



exposed crown bit like they kiss the toes of bronze saints. My movie critic approved, “This is the way we do oppression. We don’t beat people up; we don’t loudly lord it over them; we don’t get in their big fat stupid faces day in and day out. No, we turn important symbols into tourist attractions, wrap them up as venerated national monuments, and because we have nasty sense of humor, we allow well frisked tourists to touch a bit of, ‘Liberty’, while doing everything we can to deny them real liberty.”

At this point I woke up and thought, “Boy John, your subconscious totally nailed it with that one!” *This is how we do oppression.* Being a citizen in the [Indebted States of America](#) is exactly like being a crown touching tourist in my dream. We pretend the sliver of freedom we’re allowed to touch makes us free but it really only showcases our stupidity and cowardice. A truly free people would tear down the Liberty encasing visitor center and hang the architects from the remains of the plane blocking girders.

A Memo to the next Murdering Dorner

Posted: 15 Feb 2013 04:34:36

No doubt you’ve been following the breathless media swooning about [Christopher Dorner](#) and his [Djangoistic](#), fight the power, murder spree and you’re wondering if *you* should take up arms against a sea of troubles and go off some bystanders. Before loading up your assault weapons, making suspiciously large purchases of plant food and diesel oil, or enrolling in flight, but not *landing* classes, I’d like to take a few moments of your busy pre-murder spree day and try to convince you to up your game. Let’s face it, walking into a kindergarten and shooting up a classroom of tiny nobodies, while undoubtedly good target practice, means nothing in the great sweep of history. Nobody, *except the nobodies*, cares about the death of nobodies. Sorry, I didn’t make the world; I just live here pointing out the absurdities. To seize the long-lasting historical notoriety, you so insanely crave, you have to eliminate people who matter. It sounds simple, but here’s the nasty truth: removing people who matter is hard and dangerous work. It requires talent, dedication, planning and foresight: qualities that pathetic psychopaths, like you, often lack.

Still not convinced? Let’s run a little “thought experiment.” A major lament of would be terminators, and just about everyone else on this planet, is that it seems *absolutely impossible to fix utterly fixable problems.* It doesn’t really matter what the problem is. How about peace in the Middle East? We’re constantly told that this is a big hard problem. What utter hogwash, formal group theory poses big hard

problems; mathematicians wouldn't even snort "trivial" when faced with a pedestrian and irritating nuisance like Middle Eastern peace. All that's required is a few simple peace treaties, a routine exchange of Jewish and Muslim embassies, a state for the Palestinians and boom, instant peace. How about Korean unification? Same old, same old, a formal peace treaty followed by some judicious mine clearing and wire clipping. If the Germans can do it — so can the Koreans. On a domestic note: how about balancing the goddamn US federal budget? This barely rises to the level of "problem." Any idiot familiar with addition and subtraction is capable of wielding the awesome technology required to match spending with income. So my poor homicidal friend what exactly is the problem?

If you guessed "people" give yourself a big hug. While it's true these so-called difficult problems are, when stripped of bullshit, embarrassingly trivial, it's also true that solving any one of them would inconvenience certain people. If you're a [fat little Korean boy-king](#) happily banging hotties in your Commie dynasty palace the prospects of being just a fat little boy banging, well nobody, lacks appeal. If you're a [corrupt Saudi prince-thing](#) used to blaming conniving Zionists for all your screw-ups the lack of conniving Zionists would present difficulties. Similarly, how can you be expected to run for Congress, or the Presidency, without making expensive grandiose promises with other people's money? One man's intractable problem is another man's livelihood.

Getting back to our thought experiment: suppose there was a limited supply of *magic brain bombs*. A magic brain bomb can beam into the skull of anyone, at anytime, anywhere on the planet. Once beamed in the brain bomb swells, inducing a bout of excruciating pain, and then explodes, thus ending the miserable life of its target, and because it's magic, nobody can hide or escape from it. You can hunker down in your bunker, hide in a submarine under the ice, melt into the crowd, or surround yourself with a division of secret service agents; it won't matter! The magic brain bomb will beam in and end you. Obviously, magic brain bombs are potent weapons. If some murderous nut, that's where you come in, could get ahold of a thousand magic brain bombs many of our difficult problems could be blown away.

Let's start with Middle Eastern peace. From a masked IP address open a new Twitter account, don't use your real name, and send a few tweets demanding that Abdullah, Ahmadinejad, Morsi, Netanyahu and so on meet to establish diplomatic relations and negotiate a real Middle Eastern peace treaty. Make it clear that you will *blow up their heads* at the stroke of noon (UTC) on a particular day if they fail to comply. Don't expect anyone to pay attention. Twitter is awash in [impotent death threats](#). You cannot even take a [sip of water](#) on national TV without attracting them. Bide

your time until the noted hour and then detonate your brain bombs. After they scrape the charred brain tissue off the walls of government offices in Riyadh, Tehran, Cairo, Jerusalem and elsewhere you'll see a new attitude in the Middle East. It will be ugly at first. Clearly this is the work of the Jews, or the CIA, or Jews in the CIA, maybe those meddling Chinese Commies did it, perhaps black helicopters and UFOS were involved. Let the craziness subside then, from another place, and on another masked IP address, start a new Facebook account, again, don't use your real name, and remind the *new* Middle Eastern rulers of their predecessors failure to meet and hammer out a peace treaty. Then, repeat your demand and warn your audience that you will blow up their heads at noon (UTC) on a particular day if they fail to comply. I'm guessing that by the time you've detonated less than a hundred brain bombs you'll find an astonishing, hitherto unknown, willingness to compromise and live in the peace in the Middle East. It might take even fewer brain bombs to fix Korea and balance the goddamn US budget. Deleting the right people, in the right way, at the right time can work wonders.

Brain bombs in wise hands could turn shit hole Earth into something of an Eden. Unfortunately, this is just a thought experiment, even the CIA, or the Jews, or the Jewish aliens in the UFOS, don't have magic freaking brain bombs! For the skeptically impaired: anything with *magic* in it is either a fraud or imaginary. Regardless of the existential status of magic brain bombs I think my point is clear. *Killing nobodies is a waste of ammunition!* To precipitate change we can believe in you need to go big! How big is entirely up to you. Here's one last cautionary note. Going after hard targets is not like waltzing into gun free zones and opening fire. The people most in need of brain bombs are surrounded by others that shoot back. You're probably going to die taking down a king, but you were going to die taking down a [Burger King](#), so you might as well up your game and [make a difference. Do it for the children!](#) The only question is; are you psycho enough for the job?

Australia It Is

Posted: 06 Mar 2013 04:50:19

I'm putting up with a little feces storm; it's flying off the fan in all directions.

Let's start with work. Lately it's been grueling. I'm coding like a mad twenty something, wasting my weekends for the man and being very much the good little corporate drone. I do my best to avoid crazy hours but I've foolishly allowed myself to *care about the problem*. I'm kind of surprised that in my boomer dotage I am

still capable of going into deep code: that weird state where you have dreams about iterators and interfaces. In my feverish coding dreams I'm always one step from nailing a problem, all that remains is a stupid little tweak, but for the life of me I cannot see it.

Moving on: my wife and elderly demented mother-in-law have fled the US. They're both back in Canada where my wife is attempting to get her mother placed in a facility that can handle her Alzheimer's. My poor wife has looked after her demented mother for almost two years and it's completely worn her down. Caring for the Alzheimer stricken elderly is far more draining than looking after newborns. I've done both and believe me babies are a breeze. And, if one demented mother-in-law wasn't bad enough, this week I learned my mother has a "growth" near the speech center of her brain. We're awaiting biopsy results so we don't know what the "growth" is, but brain growths are never *good news*.

We need a vacation which brings me the results of the [first ever ADND poll](#). I asked a simple question: which country should we visit, Argentina or Australia? I didn't expect any answers but a few readers chimed in and, the last time I looked, Australia was the winner! Until two months ago Argentina was still in the running but it looks like [Kirchner](#) is a bigger economic imbecile than [Obama](#). You go girl! Until the economic dust settles Argentina looks like *work* so it's off to Australia in the fourth quarter.

I've started marking places to visit. If anyone has suggestions please drop a note.



Click to browse map

Oz the Gratuitous and Purile

Posted: 09 Mar 2013 20:16:05

The original [Wizard of Oz](#), the one we have all seen many times, is on a very short list of nearly perfect movies. Everything about the 1939 film is superb in excess. It's as fun to watch today as it was over seventy years ago and you cannot *honestly* say that about many films. Because Oz is such a towering film classic it has overshadowed all cinematic attempts to reenter and reimagine [Frank L. Baum's](#) world. Without exception every Oz wanna-be, and there have been many, suck like motivated gay prostitutes. Perhaps if we hadn't seen the original, [Oz the Great and Powerful](#), might be judged a "good" film, but we have and this overblown homage underscores, yet again, the magnificence of the 1939 Oz. I have some advice for Baum fans. If you want to reimagine his world — read his damn books! Believe it or not the book, [The Wizard of Oz](#), is as good, if not better than the film classic. As for film makers — just stop it! Oz is close to sacred ground; if you're not a Kubrick-level cinematic genius, *and very few of you are*, all you're going to do is embarrass yourself and induce Dorothy nostalgia in your audience.

Watching Oz the Great and Powerful (OGP) has its own minor schizophrenic charms. On the good witch side OGP is another stunning special effects extravaganza. 21st century movies are now in a weird place; if you can imagine it you can render it on the screen. If the ancient Greeks had a god of special movie effects it's unlikely he could top your average contemporary big budget — tiny brain — movie. For decades producers and directors have strived to out-effect each other and they've finally ended up in a place Sophocles would recognize.

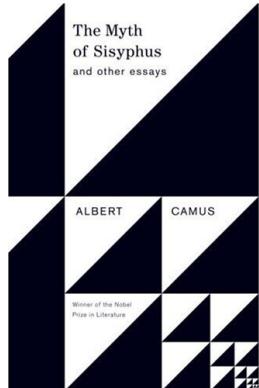
Real improvements in modern movies can come from only one place: better stories! It was the telling of the story that distinguished the 1939 Oz. They took brilliant source material and merged it with equally brilliant songs. This is incredibly difficult and rarely achieved. In OGP's case they didn't even try. The suits that ruin Disney these days have a reputation for phoning stories in. With OGP they've out [John Carter'ed](#) themselves. I believe a bad Oz witch went all premenstrual on the screen writers. How else can you explain the transformation of classic source material into the [Phantom Menace of Oz](#)?



This is not the Oz you're looking for!

The Myth of Sisyphus: Camus's Absurd Prototype

Posted: 16 Mar 2013 04:37:34



In 1942, with World II raging, readers of [The Myth of Sisyphus](#) could easily identify with Camus's absurd man. Not only is man absurd he has reduced his entire world to absurdity. Now, seventy-plus years later, Sisyphus readers are more likely to politely yawn and wonder what the fuss is about. Camus's themes are not trivial or obvious but we, denizens of the early 21st century, are thoroughly habituated to them. Absurd is now beyond mainstream; how else can one explain facile growths like Facebook. Just like homosexuals kidnapped the word "gay" and changed its meaning Camus abducted "absurd" and changed its meaning. The old "absurd", synonymous with ridiculous, nonsensical, ludicrous and preposterous, becomes, in Camus's hands, something few would call absurd. But, part of a great writer's job description is changing the meaning of words, and it's easy to see why the best of us have become absurd men.

Camus's absurd man is a thoroughly honorable creature. He respects reason and wants to understand all things. This is beyond his reach but he doesn't claim it's impossible, only that his own limits make it *personally* impossible. Perhaps you've vainly argued with scientific illiterates that assert evolution is wrong because *they* cannot see how it could work. *If I don't understand it then it cannot be understood.* Absurd men recognize, but do not generalize, their limitations. Absurd men also see that in the long run absolutely nothing matters. In a thousand years all but the greatest of us will be forgotten, in a million years even the greatest will be forgotten, in a billion years only precision instruments will detect our remains and in a trillion years it will be like we never existed. Many red dwarf stars will still be shining long after every microscopic trace of humanity has disappeared. This is an inescapable scientific truth. It's a terrifying banality that is often ignored or wrapped up in sky fairy nonsense. Yet, the absurd man faces cosmic futility without flinching or whining.

Instead of being crushed by a vast, difficult to comprehend, cosmos the absurd man soldiers on. He doesn't curl up, go on food stamps, or complain about lurid Koch brother conspiracies. He gives a middle finger to his fate and then does what he can. *Up yours universe:* this is Camus's *revolt* and, in our time, it's a universal sentiment. This part of being absurd is easily faked; every brain-dead rapper and air-headed celebrity sports *up-yours-airs*, but absurd men do not play at revolt! They

do their best to create without delusions and what idiot would claim celebrities are free of delusions? Many like to think cathedral masons were honoring god. Even in the Middle Ages this was delusional. Most were simply earning a living: if a pile of well-shaped rocks pleased god who knew or cared. Besides, in a geological blink, the same cathedral stones will weather to mud. Camus is very clear: absurd creation is self-consciously ephemeral.

Camus started *The Myth of Sisyphus* with what's become his most famous line:

There is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide.

This is one exam question we all face. Cowards run and hide; they turn the knob to eleven and pop sweet — there's an app for that — distractions. The religious create elaborate fantasies and declare war. Pure rationalists drag in Spinoza's objects that long to persist in their being. They don't commit suicide because that's not part of their program. Ironically, only Camus's absurd answer is remotely satisfying. In our lingo: man-up, stop whining, pull your weight, don't take crap, expect nothing, use your head and create. Any modern libertarian would approve.

When casting the prototypical absurd man Camus brilliantly chose Sisyphus. Sisyphus put death in chains, claiming immortality for men, but vindictive and jealous gods freed death and condemned Sisyphus to roll a heavy stone to the top of a hill only to watch it crash down and roll it up again, and again — forever. This sounds awful but Camus saw Sisyphus's fate as a blessing. Life sucks when you're pushing your rock up the hill but when it rolls down you get a break. While climbing down Sisyphus has time to think, to absurdly create, and unlike poor doomed mortals, Sisyphus gets an eternity of breaks. This is an absurdly happy fate.



Review: The Signal and the Noise

Posted: 28 Mar 2013 01:41:07

There is nothing like being right to make an impression. After calling the [majority of congressional districts](#) in the 2012 US election [Nate Silver](#) enjoyed his 15 minutes of fame. Before his election prediction I was only dimly aware of Nate Silver. I knew he worked for the New York Times, but that's no longer an indicator of excellence or even sanity. Heck, even Nobel Prizes no longer guarantee excellence or sanity. Obama, vain narcissist that he is, was [embarrassed](#) by the dolts on the Nobel Peace

Prize committee that confused existence for accomplishment.

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It wasn't Silver's employer that led me to his book; it was *his stint as a serious poker player* that told me he wasn't a standard NYT brain-dead progressive. **Progressives do not bet with their own money!** They bet with other people's money. Anyone that puts *their money where their mouth is* is worth a hearing and Silver is worth a hearing

The Signal and the Noise is a series of essays about making predictions. It won't surprise anyone to learn that some fields suffer poor, dare I say idiotic, predictors. Economists and partisan policy wonks are among the worst. Silver's statistics show many of these people are clueless ideologues or cynical liars. They're not even reliable contra-indicators. If only Nancy Pelosi, that Botox saturated crone, was consistently wrong, rather than randomly moronic, we might profit from her emissions.

As bad as some predictors are it's not all bleak. Meteorologists have dramatically improved their forecasts. A few decades ago it was anyone's guess where hurricanes would hit land. Now it's possible to forecast landfalls within a hundred miles two days in advance. The weather service called Katrina before it hit New Orleans. It's too bad so many ignored the warning.

One of the best sections in *The Signal and the Noise* deals with the dangers of "over-fitting", over-fitting occurs when a model ends up modeling noise instead of signal. Over-fitting is an egregious statistical error but human beings are evolved over-fitters. If you "predict" the wind is shaking a bush and it's a tiger you're cat food. If you predict a tiger is shaking a bush and it's the wind you have a bad hair day. Evolution favors the latter. If life is short, nasty and brutish, it pays to over-fit immediate dangers. This is not the case when over-fitting tells you something is highly unlikely when it isn't.

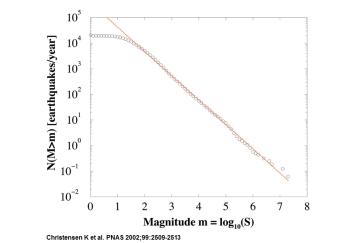
Silver makes a good case for the [Fukushima](#) nuclear disaster going down in history as a classic case of the dangers of over-fitting. Earthquakes are currently unpredictable. Silver goes over the history of earthquake prediction and it's sobering. Forecasts made by 21st century geophysicists, armed with petaflop supercomputers, are only marginally better than simple historical means. This is a tough scientific problem made orders of magnitude harder by the difficulty of collecting data. We cannot directly measure stresses twenty kilometers underground. Hence the data feeding earthquake models are *at best* approximate and incomplete. This is unfortunate

because models based on sketchy data are essentially conspiracy theories without black helicopters. You won't find many geophysicists making short-term Vegas bets on the output of their earthquake models.

This doesn't mean that earthquakes are random or lack order. Earthquakes are remarkably orderly over geological timescales. They [eerily fit a power-law distribution](#). This excellent fit makes it possible to pick any point on the Earth and compute an earthquake probability. Such probabilities were computed for the seas near Fukushima but the earthquake model used was over-fitted and it dramatically underestimated the likelihood of magnitude 9 earthquakes. The Fukushima model had been "tweaked" to echo the fact that *rare* magnitude 9 earthquakes had not been observed near Japan in centuries. Instead of following a nice linear log-log plot the Fukushima plot was "bent" and the bend led to the assumption that it wasn't necessary to plan for magnitude 9 earthquakes and potentially huge tsunamis. Here model over-fitting led to seawall over-topping. This is not your average stats 101 screw-up.

Looking back it's easy to see where people went wrong. Maybe evil crony capitalists, bent on saving a few yen on concrete, conspired to sabotage earthquake models before submitting low ball Fukushima seawall bids. Doesn't [Lex Luthor](#) do this every other day? Here it's not necessary to invoke super-villains, old fashioned short-term thinking, fortified with professional hubris, is all that's required. Silver makes it abundantly clear that prediction, "[especially about the future](#)", is hard but not necessarily hopeless. This is an excellent book for both lovers and haters of statistics.

Earthquake magnitude distribution showing a power-law behavior over 6 decades.



Christensen K et al. PNAS 2002;99:2509-2513

PNAS

Power law fit of earthquake intensity — click for details

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At the Palliative Care Ward

Posted: 23 Apr 2013 02:36:54

Visiting hospitals is almost as tiring as staying in them. For the last few days my siblings and I have taken turns spending the night with our mother in the Bozeman Deaconess's palliative care ward. She is terminally ill and doesn't want to be alone. Keeping her company is about the only thing we can do for her. I am pecking out this blog entry on my phone while my mum sleeps. It's her sole break these days.

About two months ago my mother was diagnosed with stage four Glioblastoma Mul-

tiforme a nasty aggressive terminal brain cancer. I was terribly upset when I first learned of her illness. This cancer is utterly lethal. If it doesn't kill you it's because something else gets you first. In black humor circles this cancer is called "the terminator" and unlike Arnold's robot this terminator cannot be crushed in a machine press.

We're all adjusting to this new reality in our own ways. I have been surprised at the excessively decent behavior of my greater family, my in-laws and even my "outlaws." My long divorced first wife, a Canadian physician, made the trip from eastern Canada, to help my parents. My dad said, "that was darn decent of her," and it was. My younger brother has shown an ability to care for others that we never noticed before. He is determined to see mom live as long as possible. My chaotic sister has a very effective bedside manner. She's been brushing my mother's teeth and fussing with her scarves and hair. My dad, never noted for doling out care, is spending long hours sitting and talking with mom. My wife, currently tied down in Toronto with her own demented mother, is more upset about my mom than I am. Her sisters are encouraging her to let them look after their mum so she can get west to see mine. Everyone has shown compassion and concern. I may have to reassess my negative view of mankind.

As for myself, I had a few teary moments when I first heard the news, but I have recovered my phlegmatic state. Right now I am more tired than sad. I expect to grieve and mourn soon enough. For now I will keep my mother company and try to steal a few hours of sleep on the bench beside her bed.

Now for a Nursing Home

Posted: 27 Apr 2013 22:23:33

Yesterday my mother left the Bozeman Deaconess hospital and went to a nursing home. The week before she fell on the way to a radiation appointment. The fall was serious enough to put her back in the hospital. The poor woman has been in and out of hospitals for six months. She has terminal brain cancer and is about half way through her radiation treatments. When her radiation and chemotherapy treatments end the focus will be on keeping her comfortable and pain-free until she dies.

My mother's mental state is up and down. The tumor started near her speech centers on the left side of her brain. The surgeons managed to remove most of the tumor and the radiation and chemo have kept the remnant in check. Unfortunately, the cancer and surgery have impaired her speech and memory. She cannot reliably recall

her birthday or tell us what year it is. Sometimes she cannot recall why she is in the rest home and her sense of time is out of whack. Today she was asking for her own mother: a woman who died six years ago.

People have mixed feelings about losing your mind when you're close to death. Some say it's a blessing. It takes away the fear and blunts oppressive anxiety. Others feel it's a premature death. What's the point of living if you cannot remember your life? I've watched Alzheimer's drain people from the inside out leaving breathing hulks where sentient beings once dwelled. Brain cancer is faster but it seldom dulls the fear and comes with a menagerie of cognitive deficits. Believe me sudden unexpected death has many benefits.

One thing is clear, don't expect your golden years to unfurl like some idiotic AARP or Viagra commercial. Forget about banging hotties or gathering around the campfire with a horde of cute grandchildren. You'll be lucky to get out of bed for bowel movements. Old people smell is a real mixture of loaded adult diapers and stale body odor. Live now — there's always time for death.

Evelyn's Eulogy

Posted: 16 May 2013 00:04:44

Last Saturday, May 11, 2013, I attended my [mother's funeral](#) and gave this short eulogy.



I will start with an apology. I hope to make it through this without crying. There is a reason husbands, sons and daughters are not encouraged to give eulogies; we don't always make it through them. Never-the-less I am going to talk because if there is one thing my mother loved it was talking to her children, her family and her friends. I have probably spent more time talking to my mother than any other person. Many of you here today have fond memories of talking to my mother. She always engaged with relish, gusto, enthusiasm, intelligence, wit and most importantly respect.

My mother treated everyone with respect. She had only one class: human being, and we were all invited in. Of course mom was aware of social standing, rank, professional achievements and all the other distinctions we sort ourselves with but she wasn't going to treat you differently just because you're the

CEO of an oil company or shot par on the Old Course, and, in Mr. T's immortal words, "I pity the man," *and it was usually a man*, that expected her to fawn over such trivialities. If I were to design a coat of arms for mom it might say *Bane of Bullshitters* - in Latin of course.

I loved talking with mom and her words shaped me in ways that I am still discovering. Of all my teachers she was the greatest. *She laid my moral keel with reason.* She always provided good reasons for me to stop being a moron and seldom resorted to the, "because I'm your mother," edict. After learning of mom's illness I have spent a lot of time thinking about her. I vainly thought I might go through my memories and craft a biggest hits montage. Where do we get such dumb ideas? Every nook and cranny of my mind is filled with mom. My best qualities are largely her doing — my worst — well, that's my own work. I will never separate out mom because so much of who I am is due to her. Mom is gone but she lives on in the people she influenced.



A few days ago Sharon, an old friend of my sister Aileen, sent us a message about my mom. Aileen, Sharon and my mom basically hung out when Aileen and Sharon were teenagers. This is some of what she wrote:

I remember Evelyn as a beautiful, extremely intelligent, witty and gracious woman. I am honored to have known her in my younger years, when she accepted me into her family and her heart as if I were another daughter. Those times that I spent visiting with Evelyn and the whole family sharing adventures with them in Scotland, Denmark, Barbados and lastly Frank and Evelyn's 50th anniversary celebration in Toronto at the Royal York Hotel are forever etched in my memory as special highlights in my life.

When Evelyn said goodbye to me at the end of that evening in Toronto, over ten years ago, she gave me a hug and said, "Have a good life Sharon." I've never forgotten her words of good wishes and love and they have stayed close to my heart over all of these years

Thank you Evelyn, your wishes and loving spirit followed me and yes, I have been fortunate to have a good life. You were one of the person's who I looked up to with admiration when I was younger and wanted to be something like you. Although I could never be as good as you, haven't lived the life of high adventure and I haven't been the world explorer and

traveller that you were, *I was deeply influenced by you*. I always wanted to be someone who wasn't afraid to try new things, wanted to be adaptable, wanted to experience the world, examine the world, understand different cultural and geographic perspectives, know things that you just don't learn staying in one's own back yard, and embrace the whole world in all of its idiosyncrasies and wonderful beauty. You led me to those desires and I think *my life has been better because of you*. I always loved your wittiness, humor and intelligent perspective and enjoyed our many talks about almost everything. *You were like a mother, but even better!*

I'd like to think that people who really got to know my mother feel the same as Sharon.

Ours is a culture of things. We're not encouraged to think about the people in our lives as our most precious gifts but at the end of a life our things do not matter. What matters: who we love, and who loves us! Mom loved all of us and that's why we all love her. Good bye mom.



More Photographic Waybacking

Posted: 23 May 2013 15:25:16

There are three things I like about funerals: meeting old friends and relatives, unlimited quantities of food and [browsing old photographs](#). A few weeks ago my sister and sister-in-law went through my mother's closets and found a stash of old photographs that had eluded my frequent attempts to catalog and archive family pictures.

I have a thing about family pictures. If you want to piss me off make a big pile of your family's pictures and set them on fire! For reasons that are utterly inexplicable to me many of you don't seem to give a damn about your family pictures. My wife's father was a very organized photographer that took hundreds, maybe thousands, of black and white snapshots in Iran from the 1940s to the 1970s. Apparently he took

the time to meticulously label each print with where, when and who information. I would love to paw through his pictures but that's not possible because his kids, my wife's siblings, trashed most of his pictures. The few that survive, like this one of him sitting and reading a newspaper, hint at a *never to seen again world*.



My wife's father reading a newspaper 1955.

Such crimes against imagery are common. My maternal grandmother was also a keen *unorganized* photographer. She didn't label prints or neatly file slides but she shot everything that caught her eye. Over six decades she piled up thousands of images, but when she moved into town, she accidentally sold stacks of what she thought were empty slide carousels to yard sale strangers. Some of the carousels were empty but the rest held the bulk of her slide collection. The surviving images, like this *old Kodachrome of my great-grandmother and her sister*, constantly remind me of all the great shots I will never see! Don't trash your family pictures you will grow to regret it.

My mother's recently recovered stash held a few gems I had never seen like this *great little snapshot of my maternal grandmother with her two daughters*: my late mother as a pouty girl and my aunt as a baby. The old car in the background would be marked down as a "distracting element" in many photography classes. This merely shows how bad the advice and guidelines dispensed in such courses can be. The car is an essential element; it turns a nice snapshot into a sweet period piece.

Here's another *snapshot of my mother and aunt with a puppy*. This picture is almost seventy years old but I still see the same expression on my aunt's face. Your smile is a lifelong affliction; I would recommend getting used to it.



My great-grandmother (light blue dress) and her sister 1950s.

Along with the *amateur* snapshots a number of professional studio portraits turned up. The following is a [hand tinted print of my mother](#) as a ten-year old. Color photography obliterated the art of hand tinting. It is rarely seen outside of photographic art classes today. Tinting is often unnatural and hokey but it sometimes lends an eerie painting quality. Here the tinting works. Tinted prints are becoming rare and valuable. Don't throw them away!



Hazel, Alberta (baby) and Evelyn 1940.



Evelyn and Alberta with puppy 1944.



Evelyn age ten hand tinted 1945.

Finally, here's a wonderful never seen [portrait of my mother as an eleven year old](#). This may be the best portrait of my mother at any age. The studio photographer caught her in the middle of a great smile. This picture was taken over six decades ago but I doubt that modern imaging technology could significantly improve it.



Evelyn age eleven studio portrait 1946.

Finding this portrait shortly after my mother's death took away some of the sting. I had a great mother, and because I treat family pictures with the respect they deserve, I have the photographic evidence to prove it.

Too Busy to Blog

Posted: 30 Jun 2013 22:54:21

Blogging is like going to the gym. You tell yourself you're going to do it everyday and then you don't. The last two months have been all about my [mother's death](#) and work. Any remaining hours were siphoned off by my other hobbies: photography and reading. Yeah I count reading as a hobby.

If we're going to have the long happy writer-reader relationship that we're all looking for you are going to have to put up with my ticks. I will enumerate them for you:

1. **I blow hot and cold on things.** I am either all in or all out. If I am blogging that's pretty much all I am doing. If I am taking pictures or programming that's pretty much it. Balance is for rocks on pinnacles not me.
2. **I always return to my passions.** I never give up on things I just put them aside. My affection for amateur astronomy has not gone away it's just difficult to indulge it in the wretched quasi-opaque low altitude skies of St. Louis. This city has many charms but clear skies is not one of them.
3. **I don't give a crap about what people think.** This is a problem for anyone that pretends to write. Authors, even lowly bloggers, cannot ignore their audience or they won't have one. My manly impulse is to ignore you, but I will, on occasion, profusely apologize and beg you to keep reading. It's all crocodile tears. My apologies are as insincere as Obama's: another guy that doesn't give a crap about what you think.
4. **I will never change: at least while alive.** Guys get this instantly. A few women have vainly tried to correct my bad habits; they didn't succeed.

To end June on a happy note and, more importantly, to test a nifty WordPress layout feature here's a collection of recent images. All these images, and thousands more, [are always on view on SmugMug](#). Next month I will be a better boy and write the epoch defaming rubbish you all love and crave.

The New SmugMug

Posted: 06 Aug 2013 04:55:48

Websites compete in a brutal Darwinian struggle for eyeballs and clicks: adapt or die is an understatement. Every few years users get "upgraded" whether they want

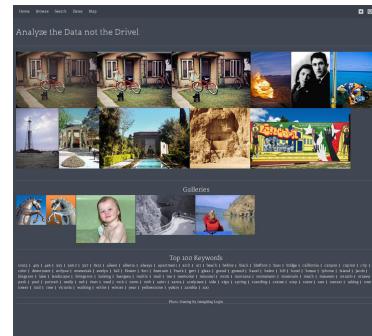


it or not. Generally things move in a better direction. Even twenty-something web programmers aren't completely stupid but setbacks and complete disasters are not uncommon.

My relationship with [SmugMug](#) started about five years ago when my [Flickr](#) account was suddenly declared "mature" by some faceless administrative ape that couldn't tell the difference between innocent nudes and pornography. I was so incensed I sent Flickr administrators a message they couldn't ignore. I painstakingly deleted all my images, mass deletion was oddly not supported by the [Yahoo's](#) that ran the joint, and dropped my account. How's that for maturity? I consider it my sacred duty to punish companies that screw customers. After dumping Flickr I searched around and found SmugMug.

There were things I liked and didn't like about SmugMug. SmugMug did a better job of displaying images than Flickr and you could select your *own* damn background color. On the downside, SmugMug has more of an empty art museum vibe than Flickr's busy social whorehouse milieu. For a few days I missed complete morons dropping snide asides on my pictures. The only comments I get on SmugMug come from family members and energetic strangers that find something they like enough to breach SmugMug's spam fortifications. The silence is welcome. This is an art museum after all.

SmugMug offers a number of account types. I am a "power" user. A power account falls between basic and pro accounts. This account differentiation makes sense. SmugMug users fall into three classes.



My new SmugMug layout.



1. **Basic:** plain folks that want a no fuss picture website.
2. **Power:** nondelusional keen photographers.
3. **Pro:** delusional “serious” photographers.

Only paparazzi, porn, wedding, fashion, sports and National Geographic photographers are making any money taking pictures these days. If you don’t fall into any of these classes my guess is that you are spending more on photography than you are making. SmugMug harbors many photographers attempting to sell their pictures. I would never buy a picture nor would I expect to sell one. I see many shots on sale that aren’t as good as many I’ve made for free. There are billions of cameras in the wild these days. Photography is not exempt from the law of supply and demand. When the supply is nearly infinite what do you expect the price to be? This is why newspapers are laying off staff photographers and small photography studios have mostly gone out of business. As a keen amateur photographer this saddens me but as a right-wing libertarian death beast it warms my dark evil heart that most of the “photographers” being discarded are rent seeking nitwits playing [Henri Cartier-Bresson](#). Still photography is no longer a viable personal business! We’re deep into another age people. Now that you see where I’m coming from let’s get on with what’s good and bad about the new SmugMug.

Let’s start with the good stuff:

1. **Stretchy layouts:** The new website does a better job of automatically adapting to a variety of display devices. I’ve browsed [my own site](#) on phones, tablets, laptops and giant desktop displays. It looks OK on all of them and great on tablets and laptops.
2. **Easy customization and layout tweaking:** It took me all of ten minutes to figure out the new layout controls. Programming *easy nontrivial* customization is hard. Here the SmugMug programmers have brilliantly succeeded. I know enough about JavaScript, CSS and HTML to roll my own designs but photography is a hobby; I’d rather spend my time taking and refining pictures than writing JavaScript to display them.
3. **Better overall site organization:** The new site organizer is a significant improvement on older methods and allowing deeper directory paths will be appreciated by many.
4. **An improved and better integrated mapping facility:** Displaying geo-tagged images on old SmugMug was somewhat jarring. The control was clunky

and it didn't match your site design. The new control adapts to your layout and "circle" area browsing is slick and intuitive.

Now for the dark side:

1. **Website migration has hiccups:** My site has over two thousands images. I didn't expect the migration to the new layout to be without problems and it wasn't. For me the biggest problem was the handling of keywords. The new site does not properly display keyword strings if the ";" delimiter is used. I have thousands of pictures with "keywords" like:

```
5x5;capillary;glass;microscope;polywater;ultra;
```

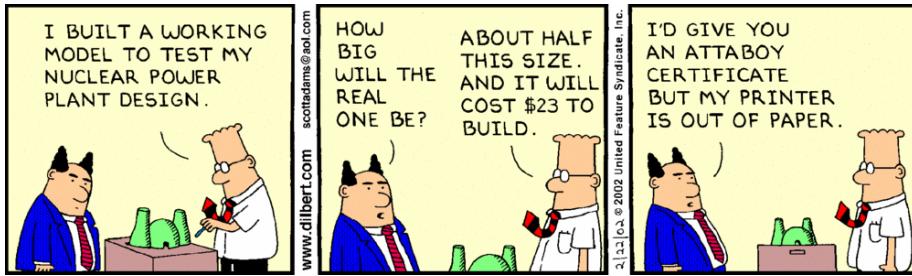
The ";" character delimits separate words. It should be displayed like:

```
5x5 | capillary | glass | microscope | polywater | ultra
```

When you click on the ";" string it is interpreted as a "find all images with all these keywords" request which is usually the very image you are browsing. This is mostly a display problem. The individual keywords were properly parsed and loaded.

2. **Custom API applications break:** I use a custom application I wrote to synchronize my SmugMug online galleries with my offline [ThumbsPlus](#) databases. This application issues SmugMug REST API calls to collect and update image metadata. When I migrated I expected this application to stop working and it did. It looks like I need to authenticate my application with the new SmugMug site. There are no *easily found instructions* on how to do this. I hope this is just an oversight and that power users can still run custom API applications.
3. **The new map control is limited to one hundred images:** The slick circle browser map control will only display one hundred images and there is no easy way to set it to map pictures in a particular gallery. The old clunky control allowed two hundred pictures and it could display arbitrary galleries.

I could go on but I program for a living. I know users always whine about change and seldom express gratitude for all the hard work the code monkeys of the world do to keep the lights on. Overall the new SmugMug is better than the old. There are problems but for a first production cut this is fine work. It certainly merits one prestigious Analyze the Data not the Drivel *attaboy* award. See the following to print your award.



Dilbert almost gets an Attaboy. What would we do without Dilbert? For more click and enjoy.

Corporate Social Media Policies

Posted: 07 Aug 2013 21:27:56

You probably work for a company that has a *corporate social media policy (CSMP)*. I'm betting that your CSMP's preamble starts with words like, "we would never restrict the free speech rights of employees but *blah, blah, blah*, ... It's what follows the "but" that matters. For example my employer does not want anything I write to:

1. Adversely reflect on the "brand."
2. Divulge proprietary or trade secrets.
3. Reflect poorly on company officers and employees.
4. Move our stock price.

This is all just common sense as far as I'm concerned and it irritates me that we now have to sit through more mandatory inane HR training sessions belaboring the obvious. Corporate social media policies join sexual harassment, diversity training and nondisclosure agreements in the ever-expanding pantheon of to be ignored corporate bullshit. In my case my company is safe. I purge my brain of work thoughts the second I leave the company's parking lot. I refuse to carry company cell-phones and I will fight like a cornered badger to keep work at work. There is a difference between being a professional and being a serf.

Companies prefer managing serfs. The ideal employee is the professional serf. You might think professional serfs are as common as unicorns but you're wrong. The young often go through a professional serf stage. If you're a graduate student you're probably a professional serf. If you're a top ranked young programmer working seventy hour weeks on some doomed pile of crap-ware you're a professional serf. If you're an articling lawyer you're a professional serf. If you're a medical intern you're



My wife in front of the Roosevelt Gate: the northern entrance to Yellowstone. The road to Mammoth Hot Springs and the Lamar valley are open during the winter but most of the park is snowed under and the roads are closed except for snow coaches. Winter is a good time to visit the park - no crowds!

a professional serf. Many employers want to meet and exploit you. They know that you will burnout or smarten up but HR's persistent cream dream is to find some naive young genius willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for *their* good.

I went through a professional serf stage but my bad attitude couldn't sustain it. Now I think like a corporation; I put a price on everything! If you want me to give a crap about your servers at 2am on Saturday that will be another \$15,000 per year and an extra week of vacation time. I've found that when you're completely upfront about these issues you either don't get the gig, usually a blessing in disguise, or people see they're dealing with a *real professional* and want you even more. Corporations have enough simpering eunuchs on the payroll, having a few ballsy shitheads around gives the joint class.

By now you're probably wondering if I've violated my employer's corporate social media policy. Have I damaged their brand? Have I impugned our CEO? Have I goosed our stock price? Have I exposed proprietary secrets? No, no, no and no! Will I moderate my opinions and think about the company when blogging? No!

Yellowstone and Me

Posted: 24 Aug 2013 06:32:35

I have moved so often that I am no longer from anywhere, but if asked, one place, [Livingston Montana](#), has the strongest claim. Every summer, from infancy to late adolescence, I spent long happy months with my grandparents in Livingston. If you



In the summer of 1967 I snapped this photo of my parents, maternal grandparents and siblings with an Instamatic camera. I was only a teenager but I was already a veteran Yellowstone visitor. We made frequent trips to the park and we all loved the place.

look at a map you'll see that Livingston is close to [Yellowstone National Park](#). In the late 19th and early 20th century the town billed itself as the gateway to Yellowstone. In those days most people reached the park by train and the train went through Livingston on the way to Gardner and the northern park entrance where the famous Teddy Roosevelt arch stands to this day.

Being close to Yellowstone we made frequent family trips to the park. I don't know how many times I've entered Yellowstone. We'd make at least one trip every year and some years we went two or three times. We thought of Yellowstone as our own private national park and we were intensely proud of the place. This hasn't changed. People that live near the park today are as fiercely devoted to Yellowstone as my grandparents and parents ever were.

When I was a child the park service did things differently. In the 1950's and 1960's rangers didn't chase bears into the woods so they hung out on park roads begging food from tourists. Seeing bears closeup was always a thrill. Of course you weren't supposed to feed bears. Signs were everywhere reminding *Boobus americanus* that bears were dangerous wild animals, but the largely ignorant public ignored the warnings with predictable results. Every year at least one moron was killed by a bear. In good years two or three would succumb. Since most of the dead were clueless tourists locals viewed Yellowstone bear attacks as a form of imbecile euthanasia. We were sad when rangers had to put down offending bears. You don't see a lot of bears in the park these days. When they show up the rangers shoo them into the woods; it's easier to train bears than tourists.

After bears geysers were the next biggest thrill. Yellowstone is world-famous for

its geysers. Some estimate that half of the worlds active geysers are bubbling away atop Yellowstone's massive caldera. The immense size and power of the Yellowstone super-volcano was not fully understood in those days but you could see the park was a special, almost magical, place with your own eyes. One geyser, [Old Faithful](#), is emblematic of Yellowstone and most of our park trips included a stop at it.

Old Faithful is not the most spectacular large geyser in the park but it's the most dependable. By some rare geological quirk Old Faithful has been venting at regular intervals ever since it was named in 1870.¹⁶ The interval changes a bit from time to time. The [Madison earthquake](#) tweaked the frequency and times vary more than many believe, but if you go to Old Faithful and invest a few hours the geyser will not disappoint. The most dramatic eruptions occur during the winter when super-heated geyser steam blasts into freezing mountain plateau air. Old Faithful in the winter is pure bucket list material. I've watched Old Faithful shoot off dozens of times. I've seen Old Faithful with my parents, my siblings, my grandparents, my children, my nieces, in-laws and some good friends. My experience is not unique. If you've seen Old Faithful I'm betting it was with someone special.

There's more to Yellowstone than bears and geysers. It harbors the largest high altitude lake in North America. It is home to a variety of North American plants and animals. It has one of the most spectacular river canyons and waterfalls anywhere and it shelters, in scalding geyser waters, rare ancient [extremophiles](#) that are among the oldest life forms on Earth. The park doesn't need me to sell it. It's one of the world's very special places.

As I entered my teenage years we moved to Iran where I spent a year before moving to Lebanon for school. During this time I saw large chunks of the Middle East, Egypt, Turkey, most of Western Europe and England. We returned to Canada. From Canada I moved to Ghana, then Denmark, then Barbados, then western Canada, then eastern Canada, then back to the US. I've seen dozens of national parks in many countries and many are spectacular. With so much to compare it against I started thinking of Yellowstone as, "a been there, done that", "nothing to see here", "not worth the hassle," bore! Doesn't everyone have a boring old Yellowstone in their backyard? I was blasé about Yellowstone for years until two notable events and advances in geology made me reassess my feelings about the park.

Remember the great Yellowstone [forest fires of 1988](#). Dramatic images of vast fires filled newscasts for weeks. The park service endured abuse from all quarters for letting

¹⁶Nobody knows who first discovered Old Faithful. It was known to Native Americans long before it was named "Old Faithful."



My kids waiting for Old Faithful to erupt in the summer of 2000. Watching Old Faithful is like a family reunion for me. I've seen it shoot off with most of the special people in my life and even when I was by myself I was always thinking how others would love this particular eruption.

the fires rage. Fire has always been important for North American evergreen forests. Years of fire suppression in the US and Canada slowly produced dense tinderbox forests that blaze when set alight. The great Yellowstone fires of 1988 punctuated this point. We now understand that fire is necessary for the long-term health of forests, but explaining this to outfitters, tour operators and other businesses that depend on moving tourists in and out of parks remains a hard sell. A few years after the great 1988 fires I visited the park with my young children. I was expecting a burned out wasteland but I was surprised by verdant undergrowth and the largest fattest elk herds I had ever seen. Between the black timbers lush ferns and other plants burst forth by the billions. It was a good time for ungulates. I know it pisses people off when experts are right but the experts were right about forest fires. Fortunately the braying nitwits soon had something even more controversial to whine about.

The most famous animal in the park these days was absent during my youth. I am talking about wolves. Wolves had been exterminated in Yellowstone for the usual fallacious bullshit reasons in the early 20th century. When people started seriously entertaining the idea of reintroducing wolves to the park every brain-dead rancher in the west decided to go on TV and show the world that westerners are every bit as ignorant as Yellowstone bear-food tourists. I remember one particularly eye-rolling twit going on about how kids waiting for school buses at lonely winter ranch gates would fall prey to bloodthirsty wolves. It didn't matter that there have been very



Most of Yellowstone is a high elevation plateau. It's great habitat for deer, elk, bears and now wolves. There are mountains in the park but they are not as impressive as the Tetons to the south or the Absaroka range to the north.

few *authenticated* wolf attacks on people or that there were good ecological reasons for reintroducing wolves. Ranchers the world over subscribe to what I call rancher ecology. *If it's not a cow or a rancher shoot it!* I've endured this sentiment in the US, Canada, Brazil and Ghana. Grow up people; you're embarrassing us! If you're really this stupid having bloodthirsty wolves pick off your idiot spawn would help us maintain our species IQ.

The park service ignored the loons and brought the wolves back. What happened, just the biggest and most successful species reintroduction in national park history? Watching wolves reestablish themselves has made it crystal clear how important top predators are to functional ecosystems. Before the wolves came back the elk and deer, like welfare recipients, had gotten stupid and lazy. Their biggest problem was avoiding traffic. The wolves changed all that. Now if they're not on their hooves they're probably going to get eaten. The presence of wolves has had many unexpected benefits. The elk no longer clear out the underbrush near streams; this has led to a profusion of wild flowers and other plants that were rarely seen before wolves. The denser plant growth has provided habit for insects that feed birds. The slower moving waters are more suitable for native fish and beavers. The park is in better shape than it has been at any time in my life and we can credit the work of *Canis lupus* for a lot of it.

And, despite the western whining, the biggest beneficiaries of wolf reintroduction have been, you guessed it: *Homo sapiens*. Lots of people are making money on Yellowstone wolves. Every winter thousands of people make their way into the Lamar valley to watch and hear wolves. People come from far and wide and occasionally the wolves put on a riveting show for them. Yes they occasionally stray from the park and there have been livestock losses. Whenever a sheep or calf gets eaten the rancher press covers it like a mini 9/11 terrorist attack. In some cases the attacks occur in the

park. It's not widely known that domestic animals graze national forests and parks. Hey, if your cow is eating state subsidized grass stop whining about occasional losses to wildlife. You're damn lucky the stupid public tolerates grazing on public lands. In pure economic terms wolf introduction has been a rare government money-maker. Perhaps if *Congress assholus* were reintroduced to their natural habit, *prison*, similar benefits would ensue.

Wolf reintroduction put Yellowstone back in the news but advances in geophysics and geology vaulted the park's status to global icon. There aren't very many *super volcanoes in the world* and there are even fewer active super-volcanoes. This is probably a good thing. Too many of these puppies blowing off would seriously depress the market and no amount of quantitative easing would excavate your baked ass from cubic kilometers of volcanic ash. Geologists have been aware of Yellowstone's violent volcanic past for decades but it wasn't until the age of high precision GPS monitoring and satellite radar that the alarming dynamism of the park made headlines. We're not used to landscapes "breathing" but something like that is going on in the Yellowstone caldera. The entire plateau goes up and down in amazingly short times. It takes a lot of energy to move a few hundred square kilometers of rock in a matter of years. Yellowstone ground movements have been monitored since the 1920's and they are so marked that even the public notices. Now that we better understand *the monster that lurks under the park* everyone expects it to wake one day and blow the joint sky-high. Maybe we'll get lucky and see it blow in our lifetime. The last time the Yellowstone super-volcano erupted *Homo erectus* walked the Earth. They we're on the other side of the world but super-volcanoes make themselves felt at great distances. I'm willing to bet that evidence of large Yellowstone eruptions will eventually be detected in ancient African or Asian hominid fossils. Yellowstone's super-volcano gives the park real sex appeal. Let's face it, chicks dig bad boys, and bad boys that can waste entire countries are volcanically hot!

Yellowstone's enduring importance has nothing to do with landscapes, geysers, bears or volcanoes. Its major contribution is the *idea of a national park*. In 1872 the US Congress took time out from their usual whoring and profiteering, work they assiduously pursue to this day, and accidentally did something worthwhile; they created the world's first national park: Yellowstone. Despite modern whitewashing this wasn't an act of a farsighted and wise people. Yellowstone was too far away, too high for agriculture, had no known mineral deposits and wasn't even in a state at the time. How the hell can you deliver pork to nonexistent districts? Congress couldn't see how to pillage and profit from Yellowstone so they gave in to a small but determined movement that wanted a park. The congress of 1872 was probably



Yellowstone Lake from West Thumb. Yellowstone Lake is large and deep and most of it lies within the Yellowstone caldera which covers an area three times larger than the lake. Imagine this entire landscape erupting. They're not called super-volcanoes for nothing!

less corrupt and venal than our modern degenerates but they weren't freaking saints and it annoys the hell out of me that partisan revisionists are constantly citing Yellowstone as a wonder of big government. Yellowstone was a product of the corrupt and incompetent Grant¹⁷ administration for Christ's sake. The same dolts that brought you Custer's last stand.

Judging the motivations of the long dead is pure hubris but evaluating the results of their actions is how we learn from history. By any standard Yellowstone was a glorious result. The congress of 1872 set a precedent that spread worldwide. Ken Burns argues that national parks are the single best idea the US government has ever had and I agree. *I shudder to think what Yellowstone would be like if it wasn't a national park.* It would probably be the biggest hive of luxury spas and posturing celebrity scum on the planet. Imagine Aspen, Cannes, Bath, Monte Carlo, Dubai and Hollywood all whored up with natural boiling mud and geyser waters. Instead of being proud of Yellowstone I would be advocating nuking the place. The nukes wouldn't damage the super-volcano but they would cauterize the celebrity infestation. Thank the all squiggling FSM that this nightmare was aborted in 1872. National parks have aborted many such nightmares all around the globe.

In my ideal world parks would cover at least a third of Earth's lands and oceans. We're not there yet, but when we are, people will still look at Yellowstone, the world's first national park, and my personal favorite, as one of the very best.

I write my Congresswoman about Syria

Posted: 02 Sep 2013 05:09:58

¹⁷Unlike the current occupant of the White House Grant did something that mattered before he was elected president.

I just emailed this to my Congresswoman, Ann Wagner, 2nd district Missouri. I'm going to make sure I'm on the NSA's naughty malcontent list.

Dear Ann,

Your summer vacation from Congress is coming to an end. Soon you will be back in Washington dealing with all our little problems like: [runaway deficit financing](#), relentless FED driven currency debasement, rampant illegal immigration and, finally, what to do about Syria.

You're probably surprised that the Obama administration punted on Syria and threw you this hand grenade. By now you've noticed that the *Light-Bringer's* administration only goes to Congress to steal or print more money, debt limit, ram through hideous partisan, "have to pass it to find out what's in it," bills, Obamacare, or get begrudging constitutionally mandated approval for political appointee hacks. *Of course Obama despises Congress. It's the most American thing about him.*

Ann, you're from Missouri, so you probably know that Missouri's most famous native son, Mark Twain, maintained a complete and robust contempt for the institution you belong too.

Suppose you were an idiot, and suppose you were a member of Congress; but I repeat myself.

Mark Twain

No one has characterized the simpering idiocy of Congress better. Mark did not suffer fools well and he certainly wasn't naive or stupid enough to believe his congressman, or congresswoman, *actually represented him.*

Ann, I'm afraid I share Mark's bleak view, but just for the sake of argument, let's assume you do represent me. I did vote for you. And, as I recall, I didn't have to hold my nose or look down ballot for my default, "anyone but that shithead," option. I actually felt you were the best person for the job. That you've kept out of the news, no sex scandals, no outrageous pork projects, no hysterical CSPAN fits, no public bitch slapping and no DUIs¹⁸ makes me think you're actually a decent human being even though you associate with known felons.

Well as one decent human being to another I am asking you to vote no on any motion that authorizes the use of force in Syria.

¹⁸We set a very low bar for Congress.

I'd bet that I know far more about the Middle East than you or the vast majority of your peers in Congress. I lived in Iran and Lebanon. I was evacuated from Beirut during the 1967 Arab Israeli War. I'm married to an Iranian refugee. She had to flee her native country after protesting Khomeini's thugs in the early 1980's. The Middle East is not a TV reality show for me. When I hear of bombs falling in the Beqaa valley I think about how I camped down the road.

When I say there are no good options in Syria I not running off teleprompter. On one side you have Assad's Ba'athist criminals: essentially modern Nazis. That delusional dolts like your colleague, Nancy Pelosi, thought Assad [was a reformer](#) is partly why we think you're all morons. Opposing Assad is a rag-tag coalition of rebels, Islamists and [crazy cannibal](#) Jihadists. This is a war that both sides deserve to lose. Firing a few cruise missiles into this mess is not going to alter the outcome or elevate the world's low opinion of Americans. All it will do is add more legions of US hating Middle Easterners to what's already a vast throng.

Ann, how would you feel if some inept clueless foreign power lobbed a few drone missiles into Saint Louis neighborhoods because they objected to local law enforcement? I'm pretty sure you'd be livid: boiling with incandescent rage. Imagine how your mood will improve when you learn the attack was [calibrated to avoid mockery](#). Would you feel a new-found respect for the bombers? I'm guessing your new life's work would be striking back. This is what our remote control war is doing. It's creating far more enemies than it kills.

Ann, do you really want to be a part of this? What we are doing is catastrophically stupid and has to stop. Vote no on Syria.

Respectfully, I'm not kidding, yours

John Baker Saint Louis County

[Minnie's Pictures](#)

Posted: 17 Oct 2013 03:11:52

While going through my late mother's pictures I came across a box of my great-grandmother Minnie's old photographs. When my great-grandmother died in 1977 my grandmother [Hazel](#) took her pictures and stuffed them in her [Hoarding's level](#) junk filled basement.¹⁹ After Hazel's death [my mother](#) recovered Minnie's pictures from

¹⁹If Hazel was alive today she would be a star on TV's Hoarders.



Minnie Raver 1881-1977. Minnie was one of my great-grandmothers. I only knew her as an old lady.

Hazel's hoard and promptly filed them with her pictures where they remained until I found them. Minnie's pictures have already seen off three generations of my ancestors and I'm next in line. Are they worth it?

Many of Minnie's pictures are over a hundred years old. The oldest probably date to the 1870's or 1880's. Despite their age they're in excellent condition. Obviously Minnie took care of her pictures and thankfully Montana basements and attics are often high and dry. I spent an entire day studying Minnie's pictures. Her old portraits are superb examples of small studio 19th and early 20th century photography, see the following [wedding portrait](#), and her snapshots are candid shots of the people she knew and loved. All of which brings me to my current problem. *I don't know who these people are!*

I have never had much of an interest in family trees or the entire quasi-delusional undertaking of genealogical research for the simple reason that most of it is bullshit. *The basic genealogical problem is simple: people have always screwed around and then lied about it.* When you get right down to it you cannot be certain, without DNA testing, that your own parents are your biological parents. There are good reasons to suspect that at least [1% to 5% of children](#) result from cuckolding and for some social classes it may be as high as 30%. In other words your daddy may not be who you think it is! Cuckolding varies with culture, time, socio-economic status and so forth but it's rarely zero. A cuckolding rate of 5% implies that by the time you've traced your ancestors to the great-great-grandparent level there is a 19% chance that an alleged, perfectly documented, ancestor is not really an ancestor. By the time we get back to the time of Christ, roughly 100 generations, there's a 99.99% chance that any alleged ancestor is not really any ancestor. Genealogy without DNA is a hollow



Callie Davis (Minnie's sister)
and Frank Smelser wedding
portrait 1905

dead-end.

As bad as cuckolding is it's the least of our genealogical problems. Genealogical records are incomplete, contain serious errors and are often complete frauds. As late as the 19th century the settlement of estates was very sensitive to birth order. If you were a first-born son you got everything while your baby brother got squat. It was even worse for women; they got less than squat. In such an environment there is a powerful incentive to forge records. Old handwritten documents may look official to modern eyes but you cannot assume they're accurate. With a well-placed bribe first-born Johnnie suddenly disappears from the record. *People have always lied about the important things.*

Given all these obvious problems I usually ignore people going on about the exploits of their glorious ancestors. Your roots are unreliable people! You really don't know who your great-great-great granny was and if you insist on telling tales about her I will insist on DNA evidence. I know that many of the dead in Minnie's pictures are *probably* blood relatives and some are probably direct great-great or greater grandparents. I cannot be 100% sure they're genetic ancestors but I can follow obvious document breadcrumbs and learn enough about these people to attach stories to their pictures.

I wasn't looking forward to the giant chore of scanning, restoring and researching



Lydia Jane Ayres 1839-
unknown

Minnie's pictures²⁰ but following breadcrumbs was more interesting than expected. It turns out that there's a lot of dead people on the internet. When I started looking for death and marriage records I immediately came across a cemetery record for [my own recently deceased mother](#). It was surprising to find her so soon. There's an active world-wide ghoulish group of people photographing cemetery monuments and posting their findings online. It's ironic but a [Facebook for the dead](#) preceded the Facebook for the living. Starting with my mother I backtracked through my alleged ancestors looking for a "Lydia." "Lydia" was scrawled on the back of what looked like the oldest of Minnie's pictures.

If the records are correct I believe this "Lydia" is Lydia Jane Ayres. There is a very good chance that Lydia is one of my great-great grandmothers. [Lydia married Albert F. Raver](#) in 1863 in Brant Ontario. Albert was the mother of Minnie's husband [Bert Raver](#).

I didn't find any pictures of Albert Raver in Minnie's collection and that's too bad because I suspect Albert had an eye for the babes. I looked for his death record and found this [confusing census entry](#). Here was an Albert F. Raver with exactly the same age and birth origin remarried to a Lydia L. Raver. At first I thought it was a mistake but Albert's marriage to Lydia L. Ayres was in 1906. That did not compute.

²⁰Despite their good condition it was still a lot of work to restore the images posted here. To judge what I had contend with browse this gallery of [before and after diptychs](#).



“Dad’s old sweetheart.” Probably an old girl friend of Howell Cobb Davis.

Then I remembered a story my grandmother Hazel told me years ago when we were talking about her grandparents. She told me that one of her grandfathers married twice to two women with the same first and last names. She complained about how difficult this made sorting Christmas and birthday cards. I cannot remember if the name was Lydia Ayres but what are the chances? It seems Albert married Lydia Jane Ayres in 1863. Somehow they parted ways and later, at the age of 68, Albert remarried in 1906 a younger Lydia L. Ayres. Having been divorced and remarried myself I can only marvel at Albert’s ingenuity. The last thing you want to do in your senile dotation is call a second wife by your first wife’s name. Before social security that could have been a fatal mistake. [Randy old Albert](#) neatly dodged that bullet.

The randiness was not confined to the Raver branch. Equally intriguing is this old portrait of “dad’s old sweetheart.” Here Minnie is likely referring to her own father and my great-great granddaddy [Howell Cobb Davis](#). Screwing around, contrary to boomer mythology, wasn’t invented in the 1960’s.

Minnie lived to 96. I was in my twenties when she died so I remember some of the people in her snapshots. Here’s Minnie with her [first-born son Vernon](#) standing in Marble Canyon Arizona in 1949. I knew Vernon as a boy. He always posed exactly like you see him her.

You can read the poor guys mind. “Do you really need another picture? Well if that’s how it’s going be I’m going to assume my petulant spoiled fat boy pose.” You cannot blame Vernon. His photographic life got off to a dreadful start. Look at this gem.

In the early 20th century women liked to dress up their baby boys as girls. Vernon got the full girly treatment. You cannot blame him for being scarred for life after such trauma. Here’s a clue ladies. Boys are not girls. Gender is not arbitrary. People



Vernon and Minnie Raver Marble
Canyon Arizona 1949



Vernon F. Raver 1904-1964

that assert the contrary are idiots. Sorry if that sounds like [mansplaining](#); the truth is not always polite.

I doubt I'll ever get through Minnie's pictures. There are hundreds of images to scan, restore and research. I just don't have the time or energy but in the years ahead I will occasionally pick out and upload attractive images. Here's [the gallery to follow](#) if you're interested.

Sorry PBS you already have my Money

Posted: 20 Oct 2013 19:41:15

PBS is begging for money again. [PBS](#) is a US public broadcasting network. Like all public English language broadcasters, (CBC Canada, ABC Australia, BBC UK), PBS is filled with tiresome left wingers that do not see themselves as left wingers. It's still easy to find [disingenuous tools](#) in these intuitions that publicly declare they're bias free.

Really?

There's nothing but biased broadcasting! The only remotely objective broadcasting is weather forecasting and even that's often ruined by climate change hysterics. Right wingers are equally biased but they're generally more aware of it. Not because they're richer, taller, better educated and more handsome than left wingers but simply because they're exposed to non-stop derision and mockery. If you seek balanced budgets you're obviously a racist, baby killing, privileged white male. *It's only logical.* My answer to insufferable bias is to change the channel or click elsewhere which brings me back to PBS.

FOX News haters have the option of **not watching and not paying** for FOX News. PBS, CBC, ABC & BBC haters have the option of **not watching and paying** for PBS, CBC, ABC & BBC. Do you see the logical asymmetry? There's a missing **not** when it comes to public broadcasters. We are **not** given a choice when it comes to paying for their crap. Lack of choice has another name: coercion. Just try **not** paying for PBS, CBC, ABC & BBC and see what happens? At some point an oppressive and utterly thuggish national taxation authority will come down on your racist, baby



killing, privileged white male head.

Lefties don't see a problem here. What's the big deal? We have elections and vote in legislatures that pass laws that we, as members of representative democracies, approve of. Some of these laws fund stuff we don't like. As a card-carrying lefty I detest military spending and corporate tax breaks but you don't see me going on about it.

Really?

I can trump your lefty love of democracy by demanding more it. **How about public democratic line item budgeting?** I would be absolutely delighted if our duly elected legislatures presented us with a long list of proposed government expenses and then charged us with voting, line by line, for what we like and don't like. Lefties could *democratically* vote down military and corporate taxes. Righties could *democratically* vote down PBS and foreign aid. *Any measure commanding majority support gets funded and everything else gets dropped!* I suspect, if presented with such a list, we'd very quickly come to our financial senses but what are the chances such a list will ever be presented to citizens of the US, Canada, Australia or any other freaking country? Snowballs in Hell get better odds.

So what's a fiscally sane person to do when besieged with the plaintive cries of partially publicly funded entities begging for more cash? **Sorry PBS - you've already picked my pockets.** Coerced charity is not charity. Until you're completely weaned from the government teat you will never get another dime from this racist, baby killing, privileged white male.

Fifty Years of Nauseating Kennedy Nostalgia

Posted: 15 Nov 2013 23:14:46

It's been fifty years since Michelle, a fifth grade childhood friend, interrupted me on the playground of Naples elementary and told me that "President Kennedy has been shot." The news did not impress me. I naively rooted for Kennedy in the 1960 election. *Yes, I was suckered, but I was in the second grade!* I didn't discover the man was a shiny lying whore-monger until years later so cut me some slack. Kennedy dazzled my second grade mind but by November of 1963 whatever passing interest I had in him had dissolved. Despite Michelle's worried tones Kennedy's fate did not concern me but I dearly hoped that we would get the rest of the school day off! My hopes for a premature end of school ended with the recess bell. My first presidential

assassination was off to a bad start and it only got worse.

We spent the day in class with distracted teachers; they were visibly relieved when our school buses arrived. I remember our normally genial driver had his civil defense drill face on. In the early sixties we enjoyed civil defense drills. As I was living in a remote rural corner of Utah the prospect of places like New York City getting nuked was cause for celebration. Civil defense drills were grand apocalyptic holidays. We'd get out of school early, pile on our buses, and then flee into the Uintah badlands. In a real attack I would be home in my basement long before the radioactive clouds killed everyone within a hundred miles of major cities. Maybe our driver thought that without our Marilyn Monroe banger at the helm the entire world would self-destruct. People worry about the silliest things.

I don't remember the bus ride. It took forty-five minutes of highway driving and a change of buses to drop me in the middle of the Redwash oilfield where we lived at the time. Redwash was a small oil camp built to house oil heathens. Rural Utah in the 1960's was almost 100% Mormon and oil people, like my dad and his coworkers, were almost 100% non-Mormon. Oil hicks and Mormon hicks did not mix. When oil was discovered under the Uintah plateau oil people first stayed in nearby Vernal and Jensen but there were too many fights. Oil people like to drink, smoke and whore while Mormons like to lecture, preach and ostracize. Redwash was the solution. We were twenty miles from the nearest small town and hundreds of miles from the nearest city: Salt Lake City. It was a good place to sit out the end of world but there was a problem: TV reception sucked.

When I got home my parents were glued to our fuzzy black and white TV. The Kennedy news was so riveting that my dad, normally allergic to technology despite being an accomplished petroleum engineer, went outside and fiddled with our rooftop TV antenna. No matter where the antenna pointed reception was awful. We got three channels and only one was watchable. TV talking heads were going on about Kennedy's death. By the time I got home his death was certain. My normal after school routine consisted of TV cartoons, but I could see that there would be no cartoons and I was OK with it. I knew presidents weren't assassinated every day, a little break in routine might be good. I expected the adults would go on about this for a few days and then things would get back to normal.

Boy was I wrong. Two days later I was eating a bowl of Cheerios in our small dining area when my mother stormed out of the living room ranting, "Why don't we all get a gun and open fire?²¹" Ruby had just shot Oswald on live TV. My hopes for a

²¹Not a rhetorical question in hunting crazy rural Utah.

return of afternoon cartoons took a major hit. I don't remember much after Oswald's death because my patience ran out. I didn't watch the interminable lying in state, the never-ending funeral procession, the tiresome media bloviating or little Johnny F. Kennedy junior²² saluting poor dead dad.

Later on I remember sitting with one of my older friends in an oilfield garbage dump. We had been breaking discarded Mercury filled electrical switches to recover Mercury. At one time I had almost an entire liter of Mercury in my basement chemistry lab. I mixed it with molten lead and poured the mixture into water to form brittle 3D Jackson Pollack'ey insta-sculptures. When I was kid boys were allowed to be boys, we snuck cigarettes, shot out oil field gauges with our 22's, stole welding blasting caps, had fist fights, had rock fights, shot sheep, called girls names and thrust 30-06 rifle bullets into bonfires. It was a golden age. I feel for the poor ADHD drug saturated eunuchs that substitute for boys in today's pussy safe schools. It's hardly surprising so many of them harbor volcanic rage that erupts in mass shootings. As my friend smashed Mercury filled switch tubes he bitched, "Jesus Dupont Christopher Christ, it's been almost two goddamn weeks and there's still nothing but Kennedy on TV. When the hell do we get back to regularly scheduled programming?" I really didn't know but I didn't expect to wait decades.

For years after the assassination we gorged on a steady nausea inducing diet of the handsome young president, so filled with promise, but cut down before his time, propaganda that somewhere between LBJ and Watergate I stopped giving a shit about anything associated with the Kennedy's. When the stories about JFK's drug abuse, whoring and general political ineptitude started surfacing²³ I thought maybe the masses are finally developing some perspective. Kennedy was an average president. We remember him for five things: the Bay of Pigs, the Cuban Missile Crisis, starting the Apollo program, rabid skirt chasing and getting assassinated. Only one thing on that list, the Apollo program, is good! He had a meager legislative impact and everything liberal morons credit him with was actually implemented by the hated LBJ. If Kennedy hadn't been shot he would be rated below Clinton and way below Truman and Eisenhower. Fortunately for Kennedy's legacy, but not for himself, Oswald was a competent sniper.

And now that I have mentioned the "O-word" will all you Kennedy assassination conspiracy nuts just fornicate elsewhere and expire. *It's been fifty years and you*

²²Little Johnny grew into another loathsome entitled Kennedy. He was a dim witted echo of his dad and the [original shiny pony](#). Perhaps we should encourage Justin Trudeau to take flying lessons.

²³Before the Internet it was a lot easier to keep the lid on political dirt. Kennedy, like Obama today, was revered by a sycophantic slobbering press.

still haven't definitely made your case. I will admit that a Kennedy conspiracy is possible, just like I will admit that aliens buzzing around in UFO's is possible, but in both cases the "evidence" does not pass skeptical muster. I only change my mind when there are good reasons to do so and in Kennedy's case there are no compelling arguments.

My intense disdain for Kennedy conspiracy imbeciles reached homicidal levels watching Oliver Stone's absolutely execrable film JFK. There is a scene in JFK where two lead characters discuss "the shooting." The film's gun expert authoritatively intones that it was simply impossible for Oswald to fire as many shots as he did and hit a moving target at such a distance. This is a simple outright lie and I would bet big bucks that Stone, another amoral lying reprobate, knew it when he was filming. How did I know it was pure and utter bullshit? Well I have been to the Dallas Book Depository and I have looked out the window Oswald shot from. When I saw just how far away his target was, it's not that far, I immediately thought — I could have hit Kennedy. It would have been easy for any competent sniper. Go and look yourselves. To test the shooting another fallen liberal icon, Dan Rather, ran a test where he recruited a number of snipers to duplicate Oswald's shooting. The verdict: it was completely possible. Stone was simply lying in the middle of his alleged historical big budget film. I have never watched another Oliver Stone film; don't bankroll your enemies.

For a few months we'll be subjected to a torrent of unbalanced Kennedy retrospectives. The few remaining magazine stands, in the few remaining bookstores, are filling up with Camelot encrusted crud. I only hope the generations born after Kennedy's assassination will show their usual complete lack of interest in boomer nostalgia and let's not fool ourselves Kennedy is pure boomer nostalgia. My hideous self-centered generation has always lacked historical perspective and here we are, fifty years later, still acting like fifth graders. Nobody gives a crap where we were when Kennedy was shot! So enjoy your 50th assassination anniversary because in another fifty years, when boomers are dead and gone, a new generation of American historical illiterates will be asking, "Wasn't Kennedy the dude that nailed Marilyn Monroe on the moon?"

Tipping with Bitcoins

Posted: 02 Dec 2013 02:10:10

For the last two days my elderly laptop has struggled with the [bitcoin-qt](#) client while it downloaded and checked the entire Bitcoin block chain. This is one of the fascinating things about this "currency." Its entire global transaction history is public.

It occurred to me that the Bitcoin economy is now large enough to verify basic macro economic equations. You can precisely calculate the “velocity of money” from Bitcoin blocks.

Now that I have synchronized with the Bitcoin network all I need is some coin to play with. If you would like to send me a few micro Bitcoins I will send them right back. I want to observe the transfer process. Please use this address. Think of it as a blog tip jar.



bitcoin: [17MfYvFqSyeZcy7nKMbFrStFmmvaJ143fA](https://www.blockchain.info/address/17MfYvFqSyeZcy7nKMbFrStFmmvaJ143fA)

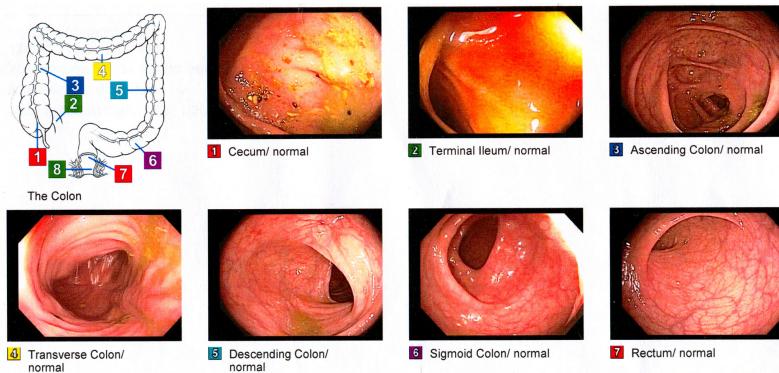
My Colon's Merry Christmas

Posted: 11 Dec 2013 19:30:55

I have just returned from my second colonoscopy. For all you indestructible young'ins out there a colonoscopy is a medical procedure that basically entails stuffing a camera up your butthole to look for evil-doers. Thankfully you're knocked out during the procedure and when you come to you remember about as much as [alien anal probe abductees](#). Colonoscopies can detect and remove precancerous polyps in the colon; it's a rare cost-effective procedure that actually saves lives. If you're an old fart that hasn't been probed I would suggest you ask your doctor about colonoscopies.

My colonoscopy went well. No polyps were found so I don't have to do this again for ten years. The best thing about colonoscopies: the pictures. If you're into colon

porn prepare to feast your eyes otherwise avert them because you will never be able to *unsee* what follows. The notes on my report noted the “good colon preparation” which, in the immortal words of John Harvey Kellogg played by Anthony Hopkins in the definitive crazy health nut mocking movie [The Road to Wellville](#), means “my colon is clean.”



Snapshots of my colon. I oddly do not care if the masses gaze on my interior. We all look pretty much the same from this perspective.

Twitter is not Trivial

Posted: 16 Dec 2013 04:10:57

I enjoy being wrong because it doesn't happen very often. When Twitter first reared its itty-bitty head I thought it was one of the dumbest ideas ever. Who wants to “tweet”, in an utterly disorganized stream of consciousness way, 140 character messages to total strangers? What could emerge from such inane chatter? Isn't this like looking for meaning in the splash patterns of tossed primate poop? Twitter may still end up being a bad business but it's clearly shown that brevity really is the soul of wit.

Twitter teaches that:

The much maligned common man, the *hoi polloi*, the rabble, the unwashed masses, the lumpenproletariat are collectively a hell of a lot smarter than their delusional masters. Take any media hot topic of the last few years and compare snarky Twitter traffic to the foul self-serving emissions of the drooling, (they only think they rule), classes and you'll quickly see that the

Twitter'atti not only see through multiple layers of bullshit but usually arrive at viable solutions long before our self-declared “elites” even perceive a problem.

The public has a collective genius for image captions. The best political cartoons, captioned images and irreverent posters are no longer found in newspapers or “sanctioned” outlets. The best of the best are posted on Twitter. I waste far more time than I should thumbing through captioned Twitter images. I usually see at least one pants peeing funny image every day. Thank you Twitter: laughter is the only medicine that's not encumbered by pharmaceutical patents, co-pays and Obamacare coverage fines.



[Twitter](#) is awash in politically incorrect and snarky captioned images. It's one of the sites most endearing qualities.

The 140 character message limit brings people together. This is one of the more surprising Twitter revelations. My Twitter contacts are far more diverse than my email buddies, blog readers, Facebook friends or LinkedIn references. On Twitter I deal with “entities” I wouldn't even cross virtual streets to pee on. I regularly

hear from religious nuts, schizophrenic 9/11 troofers, Big Foot hunters, Austrian and Keynesian economists, far left and right bloggers, porn stars, government agencies, (the IRS is on Twitter), academic organizations, space-faring robots, mathematical theorems, gun nuts, anti-gun nuts, global warming alarmists and deniers, Justin Trudeau fans and, the most delusional of the lot: Obama supporters. You can take anything in 140 character doses!

Not only is Twitter fun it's already logged an impressive public service resume by:

Providing an irresistible honey trap for narcissistic class A assholes. Without Twitter Anthony Weiner would probably still be a corrupt lying New York Democrat congressman or worse, the mayor of New York. Alex Baldwin would still be hurling feces on MSNBC and Dane Deutsch would be happily ensconced in the Wisconsin state legislature. Twitter makes it easy for our, in their own heads only, "elites" to self destruct in public. Self humiliation is the best kind.

Serving as another canary in the liberty coal mine. Distinctions like democratic and totalitarian are almost without merit. One man's democratic republic is another's Gulag. A more meaningful metric is: allows Twitter, bans Twitter. [Here's a list of Twitter banners](#). Only one country on this list surprised me. If your country is on this list you might want to consider emigration, or fleeing, because you are living in regime that cannot tolerate even 140 characters of criticism.

Yes Virginia, Twitter is far from trivial.

Jacks Repository

Posted: 21 Dec 2013 19:30:56

The other day I attempted to browse a J script described in an [old blog post](#) only to find that my employer's network monkeys had blocked the [file sharing service](#). I've railed about [IT control freaks](#) in the past. They will not rest until it's impossible to do useful work. I fumed and grumbled until I perceived a bigger problem. I have so many references to program code in this blog that it's getting tedious tracking them down. Wouldn't it be nice if my hacks were neatly organized in one coherent repository?

Let me introduce [jacks](#). [jacks](#), or "J-hacks", organizes the J related code referenced in this blog into a single [GitHub](#) repository. Most of the scripts in [jacks](#) are one-offs but some have proven so useful that it makes sense to store them in a repository and



track changes. From now on `jacks` will be the first place to look for code from this blog. You pull the contents of `jacks` into a new Git repository with the commands:

```
git init  
git remote add jacks https://github.com/bakerjd99/jacks.git  
git pull jacks master
```

It took me a few moments to settle on the name “jacks.” I considered “jokes” because programmers often take their code too seriously and “jocks” because J programmers are wild out of control convention eschewing code jocks but `jacks` won out when I remembered the refrain “jack be nimble, jack be quick, jack jump over” *whatever coding problem is pissing you off.*

APL Software Archaeology .dbi Edition

Posted: 27 Dec 2013 03:39:00

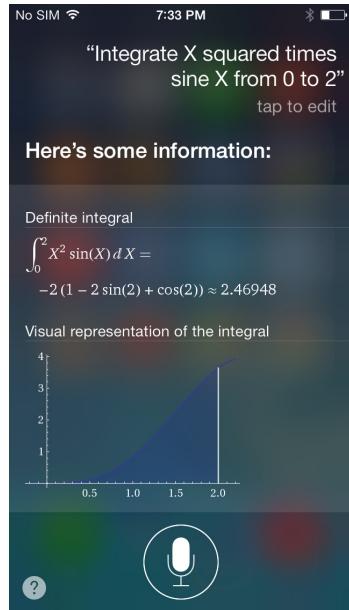


Have yourself a merry little APL Christmas

I joke that my job title should be *software archaeologist* because I often find myself resurrecting, not refactoring, code that dates to primitive and primeval eras. The language I’m typically hired to resurrect is APL. APL, the language with funny symbols, is a software vampire. People keep paying us to kill it but no matter how many stakes we pound through its heart it keeps coming back.

There are good reasons for this. APL embodies many timeless ideas and I’m confident that programming in the future will look a lot more like APL than many expect. If you doubt me just press the Siri button on your iPhone and ask, “Integrate X squared times sine X from 0 to 2.” What comes back has more of an APL than QWERTYUIOP flavor. Strange Unicode characters are creeping into many mainstream languages. This is a good thing because restricting programming to the miserly key sets of ancient typewriters was, is, and always will be a spectacularly bad idea. Ken Iverson deserves rich accolades for pointing this out more than fifty years ago and beating this drum incessantly during his lifetime. Iverson taught that notation is a tool of thought and that *if you care about ideas you must care about how they are expressed*. Why is this even remotely controversial?

The genius of APL continues to exert influence on many programming languages but APL’s rise had little to do with its abstract notation and a lot to do with



Siri's results use appropriate mathematical notations. As we move away from keyboards programming languages and mathematical notation will merge. APL was way ahead of its time in this respect.

how it was implemented. APL was one of the first programming environments that *nonprogrammers* could use. It was the spreadsheet of the late 1960's and 1970's and just like spreadsheets of today a lot of utterly horrid, poorly structured, lame amateur messes were created with it. If you've ever cracked open a gigantic Excel model that looks like it was developed by a roomful of quarreling ADHD afflicted unionized chimpanzees then you know what the standard APL mess feels like. Many programmers blamed APL for this just like gun control advocates blame firearms for shootings. They argued that it would have been impossible to concoct such monsters in *clean* compiled languages like [Pascal](#). "It wouldn't even compile." This is not even wrong. I've dealt with plenty of dreadful messes that *do compile!* The tool is always neutral; don't blame the paintbrush for the painting.

Allowing rubes to code yields mountains of rubbish and the occasional ruby. It will shock many programmers to learn they are not the only smart people in the world. It turns out that nonprogrammers occasionally have good ideas and, miraculously, some of them can ably express their ideas in code. Before spreadsheets such user rubies congealed in APL where some still run. Part of my day job is extracting these precious stones from layers and layers of kluges, hacks, patch jobs, retro-fits and workarounds and recoding them in modern programming languages like C# and JavaScript.

Recently I recovered²⁴ an ancient inverted file system embedded in the APL systems of my employer and rendered it in C#. This system uses the extension `.dbi`. I don't know who created this system; the code is old. The most recent code comments date from the year 2000 but I am pretty sure that `.dbi` files predate component files in **APL+WIN**, formerly **STSC APL**, which pushes the design back to the 1980's or earlier. I know many APL'ers check this blog. If any of you know who created the original `.dbi` APL code please leave a note.

Somehow this `.dbi` system survived unsupported, with few user complaints, for decades of daily use. How is this possible? Astonishingly, good ideas age well and the core `.dbi` idea is inverted data. Modern **high performance databases** make heavy use of this method. Inversion is so effective that hoary old interpreted APL code still beats compiled and optimized ADO.Net when fetching large numeric vectors and tables.

Restoring the `.dbi` system was a two-step process.²⁵ I first converted the APL system to J. I used **J because it is a close relative of APL** but not so close that you can cut and paste. Translating nontrivial APL to J forces you to understand the APL at the nit-bitty level. The translation to J also allowed me to fix the APL interface. The original system used global variables, rampant branches and other lamentable coding practices that C# will not abide. After matching the APL and J systems I then translated the J to C# and then rematched all three systems.

Comparing multiple systems is a very effective testing technique. I found bugs in all three systems. I fixed the J and C# bugs but left the original APL code unchanged. Software archaeology is a delicate field. You don't "fix" old code just like you don't correct errors in cuneiform tablets. Original and important program code belongs in **museums** with other significant cultural artifacts.

Original inverted file code probably belongs in a museum. This `.dbi` APL code is old but it certainly derives from earlier programs so it's not museum worthy. Even if it was the APL and C# `.dbi` systems belong to my employer. However, I am placing the J scaffold version, which matches the performance of the other systems, into the public domain. The script is [available on GitHub](#) and [here](#). The `.dbi` system gets right down to bits in some cases and illustrates some J techniques for dealing with

²⁴.`dbi` files held many gigabytes of actuarially tuned data. Dumping them was not an option. We either had to convert to a new store or produce a component that could read old data in new systems.

²⁵Restoring old code is somewhat like [restoring old pictures](#). When working on old pictures you're always tempted to *improve them*. With pictures you usually have a choice. This may not hold for old code. Changes in software may force updates.

indexed binary inverted file data. Enjoy!

Fun with Farsi Text in L^AT_EX

Posted: 30 Dec 2013 03:41:03

Analyze the Data not the Drivel is a mouthful. This blog needs a short symbolic name. For sometime I have used ADND myself but that's to close to ADHD for comfort. However if we treat ADND as a simple algebraic expression it becomes:

$$ad^2n$$

This is better but still not cool! If we replace Latin characters with colored Farsi equivalents and reverse the order we get:



The new symbolic name and logo for Analyze the Data not the Drivel.

To generate this with L^AT_EX you need a version that handles UTF-8 Unicode. I used LuaL^AT_EX. You also need an OTF or TTF font with Farsi or Arabic characters. The following L^AT_EX snippet generates my logo.

Blogging Bad 2013

Posted: 31 Dec 2013 15:49:06

Another year of **blogging bad**. My mother's death and work were major distractions this year; I fell way short of my post goals but still managed to exceed the previous year's hit count and set a new high. To show their appreciation the good algorithms at [WordPress.com](#) sent us an annual report. Mine follows:

The WordPress.com stats helper monkeys prepared a 2013 annual report for this blog.



Click for bloggy goodness

Here's an excerpt:

The concert hall at the Sydney Opera House holds 2,700 people. This blog was viewed about **11,000** times in 2013. If it were a concert at Sydney Opera House, it would take about 4 sold-out performances for that many people to see it.

[Click here to see the complete report.](#)

2014

The Great Verizon Data Famine

Posted: 16 Jan 2014 04:11:02

The other day I visited my local Verizon store for the fourth freaking time! My mission was simple: upgrade my goddamn phone and change our account from my wife's name to mine. In sane retail environments long-standing customers with impeccable payment histories get treated like royalty. I know it will come as a shock to all you parasitic socialists out there but *it is the paying customer, and only the paying customer, that is keeping civilization's lights on!* I understand and appreciate the need for businesses to make profits and for the last three years Verizon has profited from my patronage and I have benefited from their excellent cell service. We had a mutually beneficial relationship but now I'm wondering if this marriage can be saved.

I have no technical complaints about Verizon. The engineers at Verizon clearly know what they are doing but it looks like the administrative and sales division's model themselves on the [DMV](#) or Obama's [healthcrap.gov](#). I've seen this before. Most software companies harbor competent to brilliant programmers yet are often fronted by ethically challenged sales baboons. My father, a retired petroleum engineer, used to say, "It's a good thing oil is so valuable and customers are beating down our doors because head office couldn't sell shit to a house fly." I know it's not my place, as a motivated shit seeking house fly, to question the sales practices of multi-billion dollar enterprises but, to quote a very wise old white guy, "you've confused me with [someone who gives a crap](#)."

When I first walked into the Verizon store I wanted an accurate answer to this question:

How much will my monthly bill be if:

1. **I pay the full retail cost of the phone upfront.** Old white guys do not buy on credit because old white guys have learned the hard way that *buying anything on credit means you eventually pay more*. I am not interested in paying more. I have a very bad attitude when it comes to paying more. My butthole has been reamed often enough, long enough and hard enough that it's now operating on a strict cash upfront basis.
2. **And if I have an uncapped 4G data plan.** Cell providers constantly go

on about their unlimited data plans yet down in the fine print — old white guys always read the fine print — you typically see “limited to two gigabytes per month.” Two gigabytes is not unlimited, four gigabytes is not unlimited, fifty [yottabytes](#) is not unlimited; unlimited means arbitrarily high.

It took two trips to the same store to get a simple price quote. The quoted rate was \$69.99 per month. This is close to my current rate and since I’m burning another \$39.99 per month on Internet cable it looked like I could cancel cable, divert all my residential Internet traffic through an iPhone 4G hot spot and save about thirty bucks a month.

I realized I would have to go on a data diet. 4G connections are faster than 3G but 4G is still *much slower* than cable Internet. The cable provider in St. Louis, Charter,²⁶ runs at 30 megabits per second. This is about five times faster than 4G. 4G is okay for blogging, modest sub-gigabyte downloads, uploading a few dozen high-resolution pictures and normal web browsing. 4G is not up to *irritant free* HD streaming. You can stream but the image is often downgraded to a blocky low resolution mess. I planned on giving up streaming because TV, whether broadcast or streamed, is still mostly time-wasting garbage. I was looking forward to reallocating my streaming time to good old-fashioned paper²⁷ book reading.

After doing my research, considering the options and allocating funds I returned to the same Verizon store I had visited three times with the intention of plunking down the full cost of an iPhone 5s and signing another two-year service contract at the price I was previously quoted. Then things went horribly wrong. First, we had to call my wife to change the name on our account from hers to mine. The simple act of changing the account name voided my unlimited data. I went from an uncapped plan to a two gigabyte plan. Then, as a final affront, it turns out that you if you actually want to use your iPhone’s hot spot you need to pay another \$30.00 per month on top of your normal data plan. In other words my bill would be a few cents shy of \$100.00 per month. So, I would pay roughly the same as my current Verizon and Charter bills combined and end up with a connection that is five times slower. Old white guys are slow and stupid but not that stupid.

²⁶Charter Internet is a binary operation. When it’s working it works very well, but over that last three years I’ve watched it go down more often than a cheap street prostitute. Right now it’s down. Charter outages are annoying but they’re usually quickly resolved.

²⁷[EBooks are developing nasty data mining habits.](#) I have no desire to expose the precise details of my reading to busy bodies. This doesn’t mean I am giving up on eBooks but I am giving up on on-line eBooks. I now demand complete control of the eBook file on a device that I can shut off logging and communication. *If you don’t control it you cannot trust it.*

Instead of walking out of the store with a shiny new iPhone 5s and another two-year contract I left with my old iPhone 4 and a downgraded, but equally expensive data plan. I am now looking at other options. I will probably retain cable and cut off all cell phone data. Most of my cell phone data moves over Wi-Fi so why pay Verizon, or another provider, \$30.00 bucks per month to keep up on Twitter tripe. Verizon's sales did a bang up job here. They convinced a loyal and reasonably happy customer that it's time to take a serious look at the competition. I was planning on a data diet but not a data famine. [Can you hear me now!](#)

John L. Dobson R.I.P.

Posted: 18 Jan 2014 12:37:10

At tonight's meeting of the [St. Louis Astronomical Society](#) I learned of [John Dobson's](#) recent death. John Dobson was widely known as the inventor of the homemade "Dobsonian" telescope and the co-founder of the [Sidewalk Astronomers](#): perhaps the most famous and effective amateur astronomy outreach group in modern times. "Big Dob" light buckets are a staple at [star parties](#) around the world and most of them derive from John's original designs. John lived a long life and touched many people including myself.

I briefly met John at a star party in central Texas in the late 1990's. I cannot remember exactly where we were but it was about two hundred miles west of Fort Worth and was one of the best "dark sky" sites within easy driving distance of the Fort Worth Dallas light pollution wasteland.²⁸ Amateur astronomers abhor, detest, loathe and constantly rage, rage against — street lights. When I see the sky sodomized by one ill placed security light or a hideous blinking radio tower I have to suppress Homeric, (Simpson), urges to kill. Light Pollution is an assault on one of the most beautiful things the human eye can behold, a glorious night sky, and most people are completely and utterly oblivious to it.

Because our central Texas star party was far from the maddening crowds, just the way hard-core dark sky connoisseurs like it, there weren't very many people present and most in attendance were armed with state of the art telescopic gadgetry. This did not quite suit John. I remember he remarked that this was an "astronomer's gathering." Meaning this was a gathering for people who already knew the majesty of night sky. It was John's passion to introduce neophytes to the that glory and judging

²⁸The best dark sky sites in Texas are in the Davis Mountains near the McDonald Observatory. The [Texas Star Party](#) is held nearby every year.

by the accolades coming in from people who caught the astronomy bug at one of John's sidewalk star parties it's a passion that will outlive him.

John felt it was vitally important for people to see, *with their own eyes*, the craters of the moon, the moons of Jupiter, Saturn's rings, sunspots, the Andromeda galaxy and thousands of other sky wonders. He apparently never tired of watching someone look through a telescope for the first time and until tonight I must confess I didn't really appreciate just how crucial such "[first lights](#)" are. As I drove home I started thinking about my top astronomical experiences and soon realized they are some of my top experiences — period. Here's my top ten "first lights" in no particular order. Only the last stands above the others.

1. First look at the moon through a telescope: Redwash Utah, United States. When I was in grade school my parents got me a 60mm Tasco refractor. It was a simple, and surprisingly good, little telescope. I've talked to many amateur astronomers over the years and many fondly remember getting started with a 60mm Tasco. Shortly after I got that telescope I set it up and waited for the sky to darken. The moon was not full when it rose; I didn't care. I lined up the scope, fiddled with the focus, and then suddenly, the moon's craters appeared: the sharpness and clarity almost hurt. I've been hooked on amateur astronomy ever since. In retrospect the moon's craters made a bigger impression on me than my first kiss. I don't remember my first kiss, but I'll never forget my first telescopic glimpse of the moon. John never tired of introducing strangers to the moon.

2. Seeing the crescent of Venus for the first time: Redwash Utah, United States. It took me awhile to learn how to properly focus my telescope. The moon was easy but for some reason I never got Venus dialed in until one evening when I turned the knob far enough to condense the unfocused blob of Venus into a sharp little crescent. It was mind-blowing. The seeing on the high Uintah plateau was superb. I have seldom seen Venus so steady, sharp and clear. I felt like Galileo — hell for a brief instant I was Galileo! John loved showing off the bright planets. Venus, Jupiter, Saturn, even Mars and Mercury are all easily visible from the middle of light polluted cities. Sidewalk Astronomers turned these ancient wanderers into modern celebrities.

3. Seeing Jupiter and its four Galilean moons: Agha Jari Iran. Shortly after getting my first refractor my family moved to Iran. I lugged my little telescope half way around the world. The telescope was my hand baggage. In those days airlines were more tolerant of large carry-ons and being a kid I enjoyed extra latitude.

After we settled in Agha Jari I set up the telescope in our front yard. I wanted to check out a bright star that was hanging about twenty degrees above the hills to the southwest. I knew that looking at stars in the 60mm was, with the exception of binaries, kind of dull. Stars appear as points of light in even the largest of telescopes. Only in modern times, by using [long baseline interferometry](#), has it become possible to resolve details on distant stars. Not expecting much I aimed the scope at the bright star and focused. Suddenly a new “solar system” sprang into view. I could see a tiny ball surrounded by four bright spots. For a few moments I thought I might be seeing something new. How could people have missed this? Then I realized it was Jupiter. Big J is still my favorite planet. In John’s Big Dobs Jupiter is a super-planet. You can easily see four or more atmospheric bands, shadows of major moons and the Great Red Spot. Even better, it’s all visible from city sidewalks.

4. Catching Halley’s Comet: Edmonton Alberta Canada. Once you catch the observer’s bug it never really leaves you. It may go dormant but something always wakes it up. The return of Halley’s Comet roused my inner observer. [Halley’s Comet is the most famous of all comets.](#) It takes roughly one human lifetime for it to complete its orbit so catching Halley’s Comet is something most of us will only do once. The last time Halley’s Comet zoomed by in 1910 it put on a spectacular show. Astronomers warned that the 1986 passing would be “disappointing.” The comet was further away than it was in 1910. They were right but I was still delighted by what I saw. It was a freezing -30C Edmonton winter night when we drove to the city’s southern outskirts to see the comet. Despite the blistering cold dozens of people were parking along the road and getting out of their cars to look for the comet. I knew exactly where to look and it only took me a few seconds to find the fuzzy ball known as Halley’s Comet. It wasn’t spectacular, but it was historically satisfying. John spent a lot of time educating people about what they would see in the sky. If you understand, even the faintest of objects can thrill.

5. All sky aurora Edmonton Alberta Canada. Amateur astronomers have mixed feelings about auroras. Amateurs that live in aurora zones, Canadians, Norwegians, Argentines and others often bitch about “natural light pollution” until they witness a full-blown all sky aurora. It was another cold Edmonton winter night and I was up late watching the idiot box when a local news alert interrupted programming to report an impressive aurora was underway. Northern lights in Edmonton are common and seldom newsworthy. I had to see what the fuss was about so I bundled up, stepped outside and was immediately transfixed. Auroras are usually silent slithering green sheens. Tonight the sky was blazing green, then red, hinting at purple, then

back to green, red again, rippling and roaring, from the north to south, east and west: all ablaze. I had never seen a display of such magnitude. Giant auroras are not only beautiful they can [shut down power grids](#). I love it: natural light pollution shutting down man-made light pollution. I don't know if John saw great auroras but I know he would have loved them.

6. Comet Bennett near Canmore Alberta Canada. I wasn't looking for [Bennett's Comet](#) when I saw it. I was driving back to Calgary from Vancouver with friends. We made a road side stop in the Canadian Rockies near Canmore to relieve ourselves. I trudged out into the snow, unzipped my fly, looked up and saw, just above the dark jagged outline of the mountains, the most exquisite comet. I wasn't sure what it was. It was so striking that we stopped peeing and admired it. I remember saying, "It looks exactly like the comets you see in textbooks." I was right. That passing of Bennett's Comet was canonical. I've seen some great comets since Bennett: [Hale-Bopp](#) and [Hyakutake](#) were both spectacular but unexpected Bennett is still my favorite. John often reminded people that you don't always need a telescope: just keep looking up.

7. Total Eclipse of the Moon: Tamale Ghana Africa. I taught mathematics for two years in a northern Ghanaian boarding school after graduating from university. The best total lunar eclipse I have ever seen occurred during my Ghanaian years. I reckoned the eclipse would be a great teaching opportunity for my students. The school had an old telescope; it was a small reflector that a previous teacher had donated. The scope didn't have an eye piece so we adapted a microscope eye piece. It worked better than expected. On the night of the eclipse we set up the scope on a second story veranda with a nice southern view. Lunar eclipses are leisurely events. It takes a long time for the Earth's shadow to cover the moon. Before the eclipse began students started peaking at the moon through the telescope. Many of them were as delighted as I was with my first telescopic glimpse of the moon. I remember some of the older, and cooler, students had to reign in their obvious excitement. As the Earth's shadow touched the moon people in small villages around the school started pounding drums. As the shadow crept further and further the drumming got louder and louder and bonfires started popping up all around the school. I didn't expect this reaction. It was the best damn star party I've ever attended. The eclipse was a good one too. At totality the moon was a deep dark blood-red. John took advantage of eclipses, nature's astronomical advertising, to show even more people the greatest show off earth.

8. Annular Solar Eclipse: Syracuse New York United States. 1994 was the

year of [Shoemaker-Levy 9](#): the fragmented comet that smashed into Jupiter with such awesome energy that it blinded sensors on large telescopes and left massive bruises that could be seen in small telescopes. Shoemaker-Levy 9 was a rare major event. We were lucky to see such an impact in our lifetimes, but the 1994 event that sticks in my head was the annular eclipse of that year. Annular eclipses are, according to eclipse snobs, failed total eclipses. The moon is too far away to precisely match the angular size the sun so at totality an annular looks like perfect super bright ring in the sky. It's a rare celestial event that fits into your work day but the 1994 annular eclipse did just that. Totality occurred during lunch hour and many of my coworkers and strangers on Syracuse sidewalks paused to look through eclipse shades and welding glass at the one ring to bind them all. It was Dobsonian sidewalk astronomy at its finest.

9. Glimpsing the Gegenschein: Grand Teton National Park, United States. Seeing the [gegenschein](#) requires very dark and clear skies. The tiniest hint of light pollution will wash it out. I'd been observing for years before I saw it. I was south of Yellowstone Park looking directly north. There are no large cities directly north of Yellowstone for hundreds of miles and the park is blissfully black. At 3:00am I noticed a slight glowing that steady increased in brightness. Seeing was superb. I could see 7th magnitude stars with averted naked eye vision. I was alone, in the cold, in the dark. Not John's style but this was a personal first. Sometimes the sky is all you need.

10. Total Solar Eclipse: Zambia Africa. *Total solar eclipses are beyond awesome.* They utterly wowed our ancient ancestors and still blow away the most jaded and media saturated people today. You have to put yourself in the moon's shadow and give yourself to the spectacle. It's worth spending thousands of dollars and going to the ends of the Earth to stand in the moon's shadow. Of all the wonderful and spectacular things I have seen I'd rate my first total solar eclipse above them all. Of all the planets, moons and other bodies in our solar system only the Earth enjoys pure total solar eclipses. By some freak cosmic accident the moon and sun are almost exactly the same angular size in our sky. *It's only when I'm standing in the moon's shadow, during a total solar eclipse that I don't mind being trapped on Earth.*

Looking over my list it's pretty clear that John Dobson had the right idea. The things that stuck were first glances through telescopes and watching special things in the sky with my own eyes. I have spent many long nights tracking objects down in telescopes but after a few years such "serious" sessions blend together. It's those

fleeting first lights that dig in and change how you feel. John Dobson changed how many people feel about the sky. Nice work John.

Bitcoin is a Perfect Protest

Posted: 09 Feb 2014 04:39:30



The most intelligent comment I have read about [Bitcoin](#) is that it's a *perfect protest*. [Bitcoin went live in 2009](#) shortly after the 2008 financial crisis. The 2008 crisis was a defining moment. Prior to that date I *believed* that the US government, despite its obvious warts, short comings and long checkered history was still *partly accountable* to the electorate. I didn't buy the widespread cynical notion that modern elections are largely meaningless dog and pony shows that help sell the illusion that *the people* are in charge. I seriously thought there were important differences between Barak Obama, Hillary Clinton and John McCain. It's embarrassing to confess such naivety.

Before 2008 I was a good little cog in the machine: obediently paying my taxes and being a productive member of society. I was a chump: a silly stupid chump, but lucky for me, the “[crap sandwich](#)” bank bailout cured my naivety. Despite being overwhelmingly rejected by the public and initially rejected by Congress the crap sandwich was forced down our throats and *all three presidential contenders voted for it*. When push came to shove there were no significant differences between liberal democrats and conservative republicans, both groups lined up to betray and indebt the public and we've been suffering, and will continue to suffer, the consequences for years to come.

The 2008 financial crisis, and the comical US election that followed it, taught me some important lessons:

1. **If none of the above is not on the ballot the election is fraudulent.**
The political systems in the countries I have lived in depend on presenting limited, and frankly insulting choices, to the electorate. If anyone is going to seriously argue that Barak Obama and John McCain were the best that a country of three hundred million souls could offer then we are lost. If I was lost in the woods with Obama and McCain I wouldn't take a millisecond of direction from either and might consider getting rid of them on the spot to improve my chances of survival. A candidate must be better than nothing, and

if nothing is superior to the highly gamed political selections put forward then nothing should be on the ballot! I will return to this theme in future posts. The next time you cast a ballot look for none of the above. If none of the above is not present the election is illegitimate and you are being used to put a stamp of public approval on what's very probably a vacuous choice.

2. **You can tell we're dealing with a real issue when the ruling class closes ranks.** Our idiotic media maelstrom is inconsequential noise that is best ignored. Will a society with gay marriage manage their finances better than a society without gay marriage? Will free birth control pills for sluts impact trade balances? Will crosses on public lands constrain money creation? Does the size of Kim Kardashian's ass moderate capital controls? Get in the habit of asking such questions. If the question is absurd, or if the answer doesn't matter, it's a distraction. On the other hand if you see alleged ideological enemies coming together to promote a *critical common good* beware! In 2008 the flamboyant cosmetic differences between liberals and conservatives vanished removing even the illusion of choice. To bailout, or not bailout, was a real issue and with real issues there is no choice. We've recently witnessed rank closing on Edward Snowden. Again, both left-wing democrats and right-wing republicans lined up to declare Snowden a traitor and praise the glories of our NSA surveillance state. Clearly public privacy is another real issue and with real issues there is no choice.
3. **Human beings cannot be trusted with money creation.** The 2008 bank bailout was outrageous for two primary reasons. It lavishly rewarded bad behavior and it created money to do it. Money creation is convoluted; many argue that commercial banks create the bulk of money through loans, others claim the Federal Reserve creates money when buying government bonds and treasuries. The food chain is twisted but nobody disputes that *at the base of the chain money is created out of nothing*. Everything boils down to ledger entries made by sanctioned authorities. There is no mining, there is no collateral, there's nothing but an invisible yoke that's *eventually* placed on the public's head. The invisible yoke has briefly shown itself in the fiery debt limit fights about the *full faith and credit of the United States*. What the hell is the full faith and credit of the United States? It's nothing more than a promise that the government will somehow extract the means to make payments to that long forgotten ledger entry. If the public fully understood that their labor is balanced against *nothing* they would refuse to pay and the entire system would collapse. The system is such a perfect scam it's hard not to admire it. Oh, it

will eventually collapse; [fiat money always goes to zero](#), but in the meanwhile, it affords unlimited fiscal flexibility to the ruling class. Who gets to create money is a real issue and once again there is no choice about real issues.

There has been a lot of nonsense written about Bitcoin but one thing is clear it serves as a brilliant financial foil so I am not surprised to see recent worldwide [efforts to suppress it](#). The most frightening thing about Bitcoin is that it gets people asking questions about money. For example:

1. **Exactly what is money?** Every crank has their own definition of money. What amuses me is that both Gold cranks and fiat cranks have lambasted Bitcoin for being arbitrary and made up. One of the best retorts to this confused drivel notes that Bitcoin is to “real money” like the [Flying Spaghetti Monster](#) is to “real religion.” Everyone sees the Flying Spaghetti Monster is made up, but – oddly – nobody can mount rational arguments explaining why it’s *more made up* than the “real thing.” Bitcoin is capable of playing the *role of money*, so in proper contexts it is money.
2. **Why do banking authorities have exclusive money creation rights?** The historic *rationale* was to prevent counterfeiting. Counterfeiting is irresistible to anyone in a position to do it. By giving money creation rights to select authorities and using deadly force on counterfeiters governments could claim they were protecting the “currency of the realm.” It is many orders of magnitude more difficult to counterfeit Bitcoins than US dollars or any national currency. To counterfeit a Bitcoin you have to break a hard cryptographic hash. Technology has rendered the rationale for central money creation authorities obsolete.
3. **Should money be created without limit from nothing?** Now that monetary creation restraints, historically tied to gold, no longer exist the only limit on creating money out of nothing is the stupidity of the public. How much debt can you get poor dumb suckers to accept before they rebel? Bitcoins are not created out of nothing. The mining process validates the public ledger, the Blockchain, and insures that nobody is counterfeiting coins or double spending. Mined coins are a reward for valuable network services. Additionally, there is no central creation authority. Competing miners create Bitcoins all over the world. This system is not without fault and [Bitcoin variants](#) are exploring technical improvements but the Bitcoin creation process is essentially a mathematically secured network phenomenon and it is much harder to corrupt than bribing a few central bankers.
4. **Why do authorities maintain the right to confiscate private funds?**

A Bitcoin feature that is particularly disturbing to authorities is that it's not difficult to prevent even powerful entities from seizing coins. A coin cannot be moved or spent unless you get its private key. If you do not know the private key a Bitcoin will just sit in the Blockchain taunting goons that covet it. In a Bitcoin economy it will be difficult to garnish wages, block money transfers and seize assets. How will the state survive?

5. **Why must fees be levied when moving money across national borders?** The public has never accepted this little rape. How many of us have lied to custom officials when asked about how much cash we're carrying? I'm guessing a fair fraction of all travelers. We all know it's none of their damn business but being good little cogs we bend over and submit to state sodomy. Bitcoin penetrates borders with the same ease that custom authorities conduct cavity searches. Go ahead cut off coin movement! All you have to do is turn off the Internet, commander all USB ports, block old fashioned paper mail and learn how to read people's minds. Any information storage and transmission device, including the human brain, can be used to move coins. Go fuck yourself customs. One day money will be free to move without your permission or consent!

Obviously we cannot have too many people asking such questions. Mathematically sound, open source, publicly validated and distributed real money like Bitcoin must be ridiculed, harassed and stopped. Left unchecked it will cauterize an important component of state power: arbitrary money creation rights. By providing an elegant mathematical model of how a world without central banking and national currencies might function Bitcoin is a perfect protest: a good idea that our corrupt "leaders" cannot honestly answer.

The Singularity is Not Near Enough

Posted: 05 Mar 2014 17:52:19

Here's a little Google project. Search for life extension technologies and start [reading comments](#) about what people think about living five hundred or a thousand years? Some are completely in favor of the idea but you'll find legions of naysayers that are deeply disturbed that the "natural order" of things will soon radically change. Objections run the entire predictable gamut. The religious go on about how this is not part of God's plan. *How would they know?* Marxists and bitter lefties complain that only the rich will be able to afford life extension. It never occurs to them

that such technologies might be cheap. How many of you thought you would be carrying inexpensive 64 bit super computers in your pockets twenty years ago? Environmentalists whine about how this will increase one's lifetime Carbon footprint — seriously — and start mumbling about abuses to Gaia. Paranoid and suspicious types boldly assert that “the government” will use access to life extension to “control us” and pollute our **pure bodily fluids**. It seems more people want to live short ordinary lives than long extraordinary ones.

Personally I don't have a problem with life extension. I'm in the Woody Allen camp. **“I don't want to achieve immortality through my work; I want to achieve immortality through not dying.”** Not dying, *ever*, is a mighty big order. If you place any credence on current Big Bang cosmologies it looks like the entire universe is mortal. **In a mere 10^{100} years** the universe might be completely dark with a temperature that is physically indistinguishable from absolute zero. All the stars, galaxies, black holes and unstable elementary particles will have long since decayed. You might find a free electron every few million light years or so *if you're lucky*. Such a universe is beyond dead as far as sentient beings are concerned. Religious end-times are for pussyfied wimps, metrosexual girly-men and fat feminists. Plausible universal end states are vastly more terrifying than any Last Judgment or Ragnarök. I don't expect life extension to produce lifetimes of 10^{100} years; I would be happy if we eke out a few millennia. There are thousands of trees, deep-sea corals, and freaking **sponges** that are many thousands of years old? If a sponge can hack a thousand years I really don't think I'll have a problem.

My one serious objection to human life extension is simple. Most of us are dumber than fence posts and even the intelligent have brains infested with patently stupid ideas that deserve immediate and total deletion. Most of us aren't worth preserving until next week let alone the year 3000. I don't exempt myself from this harsh judgment. I've always assumed that if I can understand something it's inherently trivial; that if I can do something it's no big deal; that if I can hack it cannot really hurt. Yet I am constantly amazed at how many cannot meet my pitifully low standards. Do you really want to be surrounded by your grunting, ignorant naked ape neighbors for a thousand years? It's hard to make a more cogent argument for mortality. I know what you're thinking. “That's not fair; people learn and change.” Oh, if it were only so. I know people who have never changed their minds about anything. They are the true walking dead; after the mind goes the body is just pus and who wants to extend the life of pus?

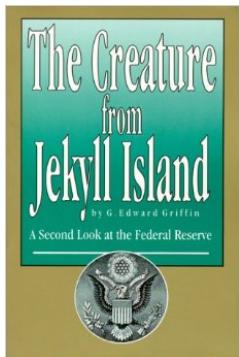
Greatly extending the lives of horribly flawed and limited people will only perpetuate our screwed up world. Minds do not change, they die. If Caesar was still up and about

we would probably still be throwing people to the lions, worshipping Greco-Roman sky fairies and marching off to war every spring. We have to get a lot smarter to *use* thousand-year lifetimes. Fortunately the singularity is coming.

Ray Kurzweil has absorbed lots of abuse. His book, [The Singularity is Near](#), has been mocked as rapture for nerds. My own view is that his thesis is sound but his timeline is whacked. I don't think the singularity, the emergence of superior trans-human intelligence, will happen in my lifetime. I doubt it will happen in the 21st century but it's almost inevitable in the 22nd and 23rd. We are entering an end-time of sorts. Standard *Homo sapiens* will, in a few short centuries, be extinct.²⁹ We will either be eliminated by trans-humans as a dangerous pest species or we will voluntarily become trans-human ourselves. I agree with Kurzweil that we cannot predict how truly superior beings will live but I'm willing to bet my Bitcoin stash that they will outlive sponges! The singularity is not near enough.

Review: The Creature from Jekyll Island

Posted: 18 Mar 2014 01:23:27



In 2008 whatever residual trust I had in American democratic institutions was irrevocably shattered by the larcenous and criminal bank bailout. If you recall the bailout, the infamous “crap sandwich,” was overwhelmingly opposed by the public, initially rejected by Congress, but stuffed down our throats anyway. The sky was falling! The banks had to be saved or the world would end. At the time I knew the failure of half a dozen of world’s largest banks would be a disaster – for bankers – and many innocent bystanders, but it was hardly world ending. Asteroids weren’t falling, super volcanoes weren’t erupting, nukes weren’t detonating, in the worst case we would have a short sharp, parasite cleansing, depression followed by the growth of new financial institutions. This is exactly what happened – in Iceland: the only country that refused to bail out their banks. The reward for poor judgment, bad planning and mendacious behavior should be failure. Of course that is not what happened. That ultimate get out of jail free institution, The Federal Reserve, kicked into high gear and rescued a host of institutions that should no longer be with us. It was a complete undemocratic travesty.

²⁹This is why I don't worry about Global Warming.

I thought the 2008 bailout was an exception; that the entire outrageous chain of events was pulled out of the asses – of asses – on the fly. Edward Griffin’s “crazy” history of the Federal Reserve, written more than a decade before 2008, clearly shows that the only exceptional thing about 2008 was scale. The Federal Reserve has been saving banker’s butts for a century. As long as we have, fiat currency, [fractional reserve banking](#) and central banks like the Federal Reserve we’ll have, massive government debts, never-ending inflation, (money creation), and the relentless insidious transfer of the costs of bank screwups to an unsuspecting and stupid public. *This is the way the system is supposed to work!* Griffin’s footnotes make it clear this was completely understood by the originators of the Federal Reserve over a century ago. In short, the “Jekyll island creature” has pulled off the biggest bank job in history.

Most of *The Creature from Jekyll Island* recounts the fascinating history of central banking in the United States with entertaining asides into the longer history of money. For millennia “money” was largely precious metals: Gold and Silver. There are good, *very long-standing historical reasons*, for this. Even today, given the choice between a pile of paper dollars and the equivalent amount of Gold, most of us would still take the Gold. You would think something that has functioned for five thousand years as global money would be good enough for central bankers but Gold, in the duplicitous language of bankers and their economist fanboys, is *insufficiently elastic*. What this means is that Gold cannot be created and destroyed by *banker will alone*. Barbaric old unreactive Gold, [forged in the collision of neutron stars](#), and unevenly dispersed in the interstellar medium, is just too damn hard to acquire and use as money. What’s needed is something that can be “poofed” into being on demand.

On course the problem with poofed, or fiat, money is getting poor dumb suckers to accept it. That’s where the legal tender laws come in. Central bankers are only one side of the bailout ballet. The bankers need the power of the state, with its ability to imprison and execute anyone that balks at taking colored paper for Gold, or gets the silly idea that they can print some colored paper themselves, to really work the fiat magic. In turn the state gets preferential access to newly created, tax levy free, funds to piss away on vote-buying boondoggles. It’s a great system for bankers, politicians and their many blood sucking ticks. It’s a shame the rest of us get *inflation raped* paying for it.

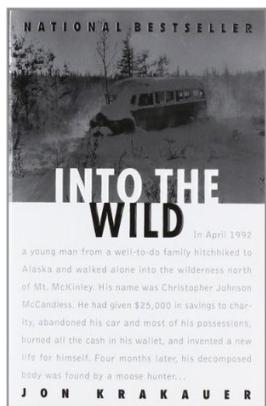
Griffin ends his book with two flights of conspiratorial lunacy: one pessimistic and the other realistic. If you’re wondering, Griffen holds *there is no optimistic scenario*. We’re in for a world of economic butt-hurt when the creature dies. The pessimistic scenario is basically [1984](#) central banker style and the realistic outlines the economic disruptions required to return to a [silver based dollar](#). Griffin is a better historian

than a science-fiction writer and *Jekyll* would be a better book without the last two chapters.

Finally, I disagree that there is no optimistic scenario, but I can forgive Griffin for not seeing one twenty years ago. In 1994 there were no new ideas about money: just the same old fiat crap served up on plastic credit cards. In 2014 we have [Bitcoin](#). I hold that the ideas in Bitcoin are the first genuine monetary innovations in decades. The Bitcoin network demonstrates how a “nonpoofed” form of sound money can work without governments or central bankers. Economists are fond of quoting Gresham’s law: “Bad money drives out good.” With ideas it’s the exact opposite: “Good ideas drive out bad.” Let’s hope the exceedingly bad Federal Reserve idea succumbs to better ideas like Bitcoin as soon as possible.

Review: [Into the Wild](#)

Posted: 02 Apr 2014 01:26:18



Anyone contemplating a “return to nature” would be well advised to read [Into the Wild](#) first. This gripping little book investigates the last journey of [Christopher McCandless](#): a young man who walked into the Alaskan wilds north of Denali in the early 1990’s with the intention of living off the land. He was woefully under-equipped, both materially and mentally, and in less than four months he starved to death.

People fall into two camps when hearing Chris’s tale. There is the “too stupid or crazy to live camp” and the “we understand what he was trying to do camp.” Like the author, Jon Krakauer, I’m in the more sympathetic camp. We’ve all imagined putting civilization’s bullshit behind us and getting back to a more primal way of life. The human animal evolved in the wild. For over a hundred thousand years we roved the Earth in small nomadic groups of hunter gatherers: civilization is a recent invention and our inner animal is not entirely OK with it.

Chris’s desire to experience raw unfiltered nature is universal. When I was Chris’s age I took off on long solo backpacking trips. I wasn’t acting out Thoreau-esque desires to embrace nature; I just couldn’t always find a partner. On one of my trips I got lost in the Canadian Rockies and decided to follow a river down a mountain. It was a mistake and I eventually came to an impassable roaring cataract. For a few

minutes I felt a bit of what Chris endured when the Teklakania, a river he had easily crossed in early spring, had swollen into a raging torrent that trapped him in the Alaskan backwoods. If you live by a river you know they are ever-changing beasts. I am not sure Chris understood this and it cost him his life. I didn't cross my river and Chris wisely chose not to cross his: freezing water and fast currents kill the best swimmers. I spent a day backtracking and eventually found the trail I left. Chris wasn't so lucky. A month after the Teklakania blocked his return from the wilds Chris was dead from starvation.

Chris wasn't ready for his trip and given his superior intelligence I am pretty sure he knew it, but he didn't care and it's hard to understand why. When people embark on new, potentially fatal, endeavors they either prepare or don't realize they should! There are many amusing stories of clueless dolts getting way in over their teeny tiny heads and paying dearly. Hubris, it's not just for ancient Greek heroes; it kills every single day. Part of training for anything is admitting you don't know Jack, and, if you're putting your sorry ass on the line, getting some pointers from people who do! Any good diving, climbing, or kayaking course will quickly drive home the point that mommy nature is one big capricious ass kicking bitch that will crush you without a femtosecond of remorse. Training addresses the [Rumsfeldian](#) "known unknowns" by giving us opportunities to recognize dangerous situations while we still have some control over events.

Chris thought he was preparing for his Alaskan adventure. He talked to hunters about stalking game and meat preservation. He studied botany monographs of edible wild plants. He told people who picked him up while hitchhiking to Alaska what he was up to and patiently answered their many warnings and objections. The one thing Chris did not do was spend time with someone who had real Alaskan backwoods experience. This amazing omission rendered his other conscientious preparations delusional and dangerous. Chris's notes, recovered from the margins and blank spaces of books he carried, tell how he slowly learned that he could not wander the land at will. Summer off-trail hiking north of 60th is usually a muddy, boggy, bug infested, energy draining slog. They detail his frustrations trying to smoke a moose carcass. He didn't try the air drying method. Finally, they show that near the end he understood his peril and bravely faced it without self-pity.

To me Chris's biggest mistake was not walking into the Alaskan bush but rejecting his parents, particularly his father. This colored his entire approach to authority figures and made it very difficult for him to seek out and profit from the experience of others. Our hunter gather ancestors worked together to survive. They depended on and learned from each other. They knew that rejecting your clan and wandering

alone was extremely dangerous. Well guess what, a hundred thousand years later, it still is! The next time you think about fleeing into the wild keep Chris in mind it might just save your behind.

Cosmos Reboot

Posted: 12 Apr 2014 00:34:50



I am enjoying Neil deGrasse Tyson's reboot of *Cosmos*. So far it's as good as the early 1980's Sagan original. Popularizing science is a thankless task. Successful stars like Tyson and Sagan will earn nothing but envy and scorn from their peers.

They'll be derided as dilettantes and panderers whoring out science for demeaning public fame and filthy capitalist lucre. "Academic politics is the most vicious and bitter form of politics, because the stakes are so low." Such *trollish* antics are hardly surprising. Watching the success of the *undeserving* drives men (and bitches) mad and academics, despite being a tad [smarter than the average bear](#), are not exempt.

The snarky back-biting of resentful peers is understandable and I'm sure people like Sagan and Tyson eventually come to see it as a laurel. Yes, *Cosmos* is dumbing down General Relativity, glossing over the fine points of the Standard Model and ignoring many of the complications of DNA/RNA replication but what the Hell do you expect? Nature is a complicated beast and human beings are slightly evolved naked apes. Most of us can barely walk and chew let alone ponder the formal mathematics of renormalization. *Cosmos* will not turn people into Nobel candidates but it might teach them enough to think twice about bowing to lunacies like: the Earth is six thousand years old, there was a global flood in recent times, dowsing works, unidentified lights in the sky are alien spaceships, vaccinations cause autism, bigfoot is crapping in backyards, evolution is wrong, global warming is going to kill us all and prophecy is real.

Science is hard on nonsense but only if it engages. The biggest mistake you can make is ceding the battlefield to your enemies. Recently [Bill Nye took a lot of heat for debating a creationist](#). In silly lefty circles *talking to these people only elevates them*. They felt Nye was making a big mistake by sharing the stage with a young earther, but then lefties have always been more comfortable with outright suppression, libelous slander and five-minute hates. *Shut up they explained!* Winning an argument on pure intellectual merit reeks of white male privilege and decent liberal airheads

just don't go there. Now I'm more of a crush your enemies, "drive them before you, and [hear the lamentations of the women](#)," type of guy. So I'm glad people like Nye, Tyson and Sagan suit up and slay nitwits.

And, when it came to slaying nitwits, Sagan was in a rarefied class. He debunked [Mars facer's](#), [Velikovsky enthusiasts](#), UFO fanatics and more with characteristic style. Twenty years later his arguments still hold up. Sagan's adherence to the skeptic's creed, *it's not the skeptic's job to prove an assertion false, it's the proponent's job to make its case*, infuriated opponents and delighted "drive them before you" hard-asses like myself. This all happened before the Internet was widely available so I didn't see how deeply Sagan got under idiot skin until he died in 1996.

By 1996 the web had spread everywhere you could make a phone call. I was using 56K BAUD dial-up then and for someone who started with 300 BAUD acoustic modems it seemed like a golden age. The day that Sagan died I remember thinking "it will be interesting to read the public's eulogies." I logged on expecting human decency only to find, *for the first time*, Internet trolls. Large numbers of vicious cretins hated Sagan and actively celebrated his death. The morbidly religious imagined a sodomized Sagan roasting in Hell for the crime of atheism while scores of UFO dolts reiterated the very fallacies Sagan had debunked: the feeble-minded love proof by repetition. I wasn't shocked, I don't do shock, but I was surprised. The tone was everything we've come to expect and love in modern unhinged troll-dom. I downgraded my already low opinion of mankind.

As nasty as Sagan's death celebrations were I consoled myself with the fact that we're not burned alive for entertaining unpopular cosmologies. It wasn't always so as Cosmos attests. Left unchecked the omnipresent goons among us would love to grind Orwell's boot in our faces forever. Part of what holds them at bay is science and its ambassadors like Tyson and Sagan. So thanks Neil, and please continue ignoring your academic trolls.

Blood Morons

Posted: 14 Apr 2014 16:39:03

Here we go again; *literal lunatics* are, for the zillionth time, announcing the end of the world. What's going to do us in this time? Would you believe the next four lunar eclipses? Starting tonight, an unusual, *but not rare*, sequence of four lunar eclipses begins. Some [religious loons](#) are claiming this so-called *eclipse tetrad* is a sign of the end times. Oh, if it were only so. Imagine a world cleansed of imbeciles!

Unfortunately, as [Fred Espenak](#) notes on his highly regarded eclipse pages, there is nothing unusual about this sequence of eclipses. In the last five thousand years we've had 142 eclipse tetrads. That's about one world ending every thirty-five years. Look around people; we're still here.

It astounds me that there is still a market for such nonsense. Astrology, and that's all this blood moon rubbish is, has been completely, totally, absolutely and utterly debunked. On this the science really is settled! But, when have we ever let science get in the way of a [good marketing opportunity](#), and world endings are well — world ending — sales opportunities. Get your end times before they're gone! Running astronomical scams is easy because large swaths of the public cannot reliably answer basic questions like: [does the Sun go around the Earth?](#) Maintaining such levels of ignorance must be exhausting.

You might want to pull your head out of your blood moron ass long enough to observe tonight's total lunar eclipse. It starts around midnight [here in St. Louis](#) with totality commencing around 2:00 am. I'll be out there, St. Louis weather permitting, shooting eclipse tracks. With proper framing eclipse tracks make neat pictures. If what I have in mind pans out it will constitute my next post.

[Pussydent Hildabeast](#)

Posted: 15 Apr 2014 21:41:44

My blood moon photography didn't turn out because I didn't. Come midnight fatigue, familiarity and spotty weather conspired to send this exhausted W2³⁰ drone to bed. It's just as well; if you're not doing consider sleeping. In six months I'll get another shot at photographing a blood moon. For the nonce, I'll muse on menstrual moon madness. Exactly what Earth shaking event does this terrible tetrad foretell?

*Some cry Ukraine
I say are you insane*

*Others holler
The demise of the dollar*

³⁰W2 is a basic IRS tax form in the United State. I calculate my taxes by hand. I sometimes do the arithmetic on paper just to increase the pain and rage. Taxation should hurt and in my case it does. Taxes are by far the largest "line item" in my budget, but what the heck, lesbians on welfare need free birth control.

*Moon free bleeding
We're not needing*

*Someone on the Internet
Is wrong*

But now, in the blood moon discharge, it's clear a fate worse than community organizers awaits a pummeled public. Behold, *Pussydent Hildabeast*,³¹ a rough nagging crone, her "hour come round at last, slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?"

*Soon we'll beg
Who*

*To let
The dogs of war out*

Ukraine takeaway: Don't give up your Nukes

Posted: 18 Apr 2014 14:07:29

What's the one sentence takeaway from the unfolding Ukraine mess? **Don't give up your nukes!** It's unlikely that any of this would be happening if Ukraine had retained their nuclear weapons instead of turning them in for the magic beans of "international guarantees." It would be interesting to review the anti-nuke sales pitches made to Ukrainian officials; I'm guessing large undisclosed deposits were made to key bank accounts because **such stupidity** is hard to reconcile otherwise.

Nuclear weapons are so icky and evil that **enlightened beings pine** for a nuke free world. Why? *Because the world before nukes was just so peachy wonderful!* Surely you remember that awesome world, great states only marched off to world wars every generation or so. The strong never rolled over the weak, and we all lived in peace and prosperity. OK, I'm being sarcastic about peace and prosperity, but consider this, since the advent of nuclear weapons, there have been no, **great state vs. great state**, major wars.³² The simple truth is: nuclear weapons have done more for world

³¹A Pussydent is a *metaphorically ball-less* president and a Hildabeast is Hillary Clinton.

³²There have been dozens of great state vs. small state and hundreds of small state vs. smaller state wars but no nuclear powers, even relatively crazy ones like Pakistan and India, have come to nuclear blows. I predict that when Iran *shows nuclear* instead of nuking Israel it will suddenly find reasons not to. There's nothing like immediate annihilation to clear the mind.

peace than all the naive treaties, peace conferences and marches ever held.

War, despite the propaganda to the contrary, is a fundamentally rational undertaking. There's a famous line in the movie *Patton*. While watching a long line of trucks and armored vehicles roll over Sicilian countryside the great general declares that all human achievements pale in comparison to war. Before getting your peacenik panties in an indigent bloodstained bunch think about what this means. It's an irrefutable historical fact that humans have invested enormous amounts of time and energy planning and executing wars. Some wars are accidental but most are planned, and here's the surprisingly bit, many of the plans make perfect business sense. If you can crush an opponent and advance your interests with acceptable losses what's going to stop you: international law, naive new age dolts, human decency, the UN? How about nuclear weapons? *Nuclear weapons have pushed losses beyond acceptable and that is the only reason great states have not directly engaged in the last seventy years.*

Unfortunately, the old world of a few nuclear states and a naive non-proliferation treaty is unwinding. It was pretty frayed before the Ukraine crisis but now it's dead. Any state that depends on a nuclear armed ally coming their rescue is reconsidering. Can Japan depend on the US to back it up in a conflict with China? What about Australia? Even Canada has to wonder if anyone has their back in the arctic. In the years ahead we are going to see a rash of new nuclear powers. I doubt these new powers will be stupid enough to detonate bombs in the open. Most will follow the Israeli model: acquire the ability but never officially disclose it. I suspect Iran is already a member of this club simply because US intelligence, (don't make me laugh), says otherwise. The world is going to get a lot more scary but don't worry you can only die — in excruciating pain — once.

What's the opposite of Transcendence?

Posted: 19 Apr 2014 01:52:45

Serious science fiction is a demanding cinematic genre; that's why you see so little of it! Most of what passes for science fiction is out-and-out comic fantasy. In the last year only three marginally serious science fiction films made it to wide release: [Catching Fire](#), [Divergent](#) and [Transcendence](#). Sadly, they're all pretty awful and *Transcendence* is the biggest letdown of the three. Here's why.

Transcendence is another riff on *real AI*. Even though we live in a world of talking cell phones and computer Jeopardy champions a sizeable cohort of *AI deniers* claim *machines will never think*. The best answer I've heard to this came from a young

woman who noted that, “I am a machine and I think.” Well I am thinking machine too and until there are serious scientific or mathematical arguments demonstrating that minds cannot, even in principle, be simulated by computations, assuming intelligence is algorithmic remains our best working hypothesis. Transcendence gets all this right. None of the characters in Transcendence go on about whether real AI is possible. Even the fearful anti-AI faction takes it as a given; it’s what they are afraid of.



If intelligence is algorithmic then it follows that we are nothing more than programs trapped in messy hardware. Separating hardware and software is one of the glories of our age. We take it for granted that if we change the software we change the machine. The other day I killed off my old WinXP laptop and then resurrected it as a [Mint Linux](#) device. The hardware is the same but the machine is very different. We cannot do this with brains — yet. The software that makes you, you, is regrettably entwined with the hardware that runs you. Nature has evolved better intellectual property protection than a division of parasitic IP lawyers. One of the great challenges of our age is breaking down nature’s intellectual property protection and reading out the software in brains. Transcendence also gets all this right. The best part of the film involves uploading a dying Will Caster, (Johnny Depp), into a bank of quantum computers.³³

Up until Will goes live on his quantum cores Transcendence is a fine film. I kept pinching myself thinking: they’re not screwing it up or dumbing it down. This might be great. Then my hopes were crushed. Before Will went all quantum *supercomputery* he gave a TED’ish talk pointing out that when real AI arrives it will have more raw intellectual capacity than all human brains combined. When transcendent beings emerge in stories the plot often goes straight to pot. This is not a new artistic problem. It’s so common in science fiction that I even have a name for it: *the superior being problem*.

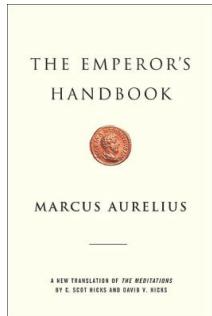
Depicting superior beings poses fundamental problems for feeble brained naked ape authors. Look at what a moron God is in the first few books of the Bible. Scores of fine science fiction novels have been trashed by trying to imagine what truly superior beings would think and do. The only approach that works is oblique. You can suggest the workings of superior minds. [2001: A Space Odyssey](#) is a classic example of doing this right, but for reasons that escape me, many authors take on the inner life of superior minds only to show their own rather mediocre ones. Transcendence didn’t even make an honest effort to deal with the superior being problem: what a disappointment. Instead of enjoying new ideas I spent the rest of

³³The jury is out on the feasibility of practical quantum computers. If quantum computers can be made to work they will solve certain classes of problems faster than conventional machines but, and this is a big but, they will not expand the notion of what’s *computable*. It’s rather amazing that what’s computable has not expanded since Turing’s great theorems of the 1930’s.

Transcendence wondering why our transcendent protagonist was such a dolt. Not really the transcendent experience I was looking for.

Marcus Aurelius tunes my RSS Feeds

Posted: 10 May 2014 16:08:13



The Emperor's Handbook is a new translation of Marcus Aurelius' classic *The Meditations*. Marcus Aurelius was a second century Roman emperor and stoic philosopher. You probably know him as the old guy (Richard Harris) that chose Maximus (Russell Crowe) as his successor in *Gladiator*. Marcus is counted among the “five good Roman emperors”³⁴ and his *Meditations* has been hailed as the single best book ever written by a major ruler. Nowadays every semi-literate hack that’s held office dumps memoirs. The more vacuous excrete before holding office! While political autobiography is usually the vilest form of pornography and begs the question; is book burning all bad? There are exceptions and The Meditations is a magnificent example.

The Emperors Handbook is a sequence of short notes. Some are sentences like:

Not knowing what other people are thinking is not the cause of much human misery, but failing to understand the workings of one's own mind is bound to lead to unhappiness

How shameful and absurd it is for the spirit to surrender when the body is able to fight on!

What is useless for the hive is of no use to bee.

Others take a page or two. It's not clear that Marcus intended to “publish” his notes and this may partly account for their frank and honest elegance. I don't read ancient Greek, the language Marcus used to compose his notes, so I cannot judge his original style but the Hicks brother's English translation is an absolute delight. I often found myself rereading passages aloud to fully savor Marcus's phrases; they ring like poetry and tell like prose. This guy would crush modern Internet trolls!

The most striking thing about Marcus's passages is their stark modernity. If you ignore the allusions to multiple gods and references to 2nd century contemporaries many of Marcus's 1,800 year old notes might have been composed yesterday. The

³⁴Most Roman emperors were brutal corrupt monsters.

following would not be out-of-place in the preamble of any modern mathematical logic text.

Reason and logic are governed by their own laws and employ their own methods. They launch themselves at will, and they head straight for their target. This is why we call actions that seem to us reasonable and logical “right,” because they are right on target.

Of course the real measure of any work is: does it change the way you think and act? A lot of Marcus’s stoic advice will be hard for us. He repeatedly stresses the importance of playing your part in the greater scheme of things. In his view the universe is either meaningless atoms smashing together or it’s arranged by providence. If the first case holds then we should play our part because we are social beings and need the cooperation and support of others to fully prosper. If the second holds then we should strive to find our designated purpose and execute it to the best of our abilities. Either way we should do our duty without whining. A stoic man’s “[got to do what a man’s got to do](#).”

I’m more of a skeptic than Marcus, and I have the benefit of 1,800 more years of history and science to draw on, so until there is overwhelming, ultra-hard, fully repeatable, and independently verified scientific evidence to the contrary, it’s almost certain that life is meaningless and random! The “atoms” that smash together in the 21st century have [a richer taxonomy](#) than their hypothetical 2nd century antecedents but they are just as meaningless. The notion that we have a duty or purpose is ludicrous. We are, as Richard Dawkins wrote in the Selfish Gene long ago, robots evolved to propagate genes. And, as many have noted, it’s not clear that “intelligent robots” are ideal for gene propagation: bacteria and ants are doing a better job. I cannot accept the unsubstantiated notion of duty so I will not play my alleged part. The greater scheme will have to manage without me.

Though I reject “duty” I still find much of use in The Meditations. Of great value is Marcus’s long view.

Camillus, Caeso, Volesus, Dentatus and to a lesser degree Scipio and Cato, and yes, even Augustus, Hadrian and Antoninus are less spoken of now than they were in their own days. For all things fade away, become the stuff of legend, and are soon buried by oblivion. Mind you, this is true only for those who blazed once like bright stars in the firmament, but for the rest, as soon a few clods of earth cover their corpses, they are “out of sight, out of mind.”

That pretty much sums up my approach to the Obama administration. Marcus also has sound advice on Internet filtering.

Bear in mind that the measure of a man is the worth of the things he cares about.

If you find something predictable and shrill do a quick calculation. Does the signal justify enduring the noise? I went through my long list of [Feedly](#) RSS feeds and deleted two prominent sources of noise: [The Raw Story](#) and [Breitbart](#). These sites are loud practitioners of *look at this idiot journalism*. One side is predictably far left-wing and the other is predictably far right-wing. Occasionally they cough up something worth a look but usually their articles, and attending moronic troll infested commentary, is a complete waste of time. Is such drivel worthy of my gaze? Applying Marcus's rule I had to cut them loose. Thank you Marcus for pruning my RSS feeds.

Review: Finding Vivian Maier

Posted: 12 May 2014 23:23:39

I suffer from SLAM (Spouse that Likes Art-house Movies). I'm sure you're familiar with this common affliction. It strikes when you want to see [Spider-Man 2](#) but, because you dearly love your spouse, you settle on some "uplifting work of art" that can only be seen in a cramped, look around the pretentious fathead ahead in front of you, dingy art-house cinema. SLAM sufferers get a break in St. Louis; there are only two art-house cinemas and their usual yard-sale like fare is dull even by art-house standards. But, as any yard-sale addict will tell you, there are diamonds in the debris and *Finding Vivian Maier* is a gem.

[Finding Vivian Maier](#) is a documentary about a great street photographer, Vivian Maier (1926 — 2009) that you have probably never heard of. I had never heard of her and I'm a [keen amateur](#) photographer with a nagging interest in the history and technology of photography. I've read [all three of Ansel Adams](#) classic camera books, plowed through many giant histories of photography, and endured as many Photoshop and image restoration tomes as I can stomach. I'm not an artist; I'm a *technisté!* A *technisté* is someone who has technical artistic skills but is not phony enough to be an *artiste*. Vivian Maier is an *anti-technisté*. She's a true photographic artist that showed astonishingly low levels of interest in the craft and technology of photography.

Her story, as one lady in the film noted, is more interesting than her work. Nobody



Vivian Maier 1956. Vivian enjoyed self-portraits and mirrors. This is not vanity. All photographers fall prey to self-reflections. I am [certainly guilty](#).

had heard of Vivian before 2007. She isn't mentioned in giant histories of photography published before 2007 so it's not surprising I missed her. She worked most of her life as a nanny. She didn't hang around with other photographers and she apparently never made a serious effort to show her photographs. Even stranger, she rarely printed her pictures and shot thousands of frames *that she never developed*. She must have been content to look at her negatives if even that. This astounds me! I cannot tell if I have a good shot until I "develop" it. For most of her long life she snapped away in the background and it's likely that her astonishing body of work would have vanished if John Maloof hadn't bought a lot of her negatives at an auction in 2007.

For Vivian the act of capture sufficed and what wonderful captures they are. Her work is being [exhibited around the world](#). I will certainly be looking out for the next show coming my way. You can see [some of her pictures here](#) and, for those of you that care, Finding Vivian Maier is much better than Spider-Man 2.

Your Bitcoins are Now Welcome!

Posted: 07 Jun 2014 21:06:28

Recently [Coinbase](#) introduced payment pages. [Here's my page](#). Payment pages simplify the process of paying with Bitcoins. In the last six months more and more businesses have started accepting Bitcoins. Once people get cryptocurrencies they inevitably start questioning the legitimacy of national currencies. This is all good. National currencies are part of the past. It's embarrassing to trade *debased presidents* or *unnecessary queens* for goods.

I now pay online fees with Bitcoins when I can. I am doing this for three reasons.

1. **Bitcoin payments are orders of magnitude more secure than credit**

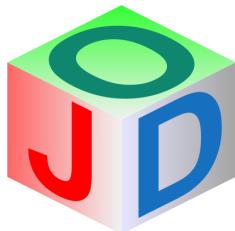
cards, PayPal or other online payment methods. When you pay with Bitcoins you don't spread personal information around. Bitcoin is a nightmare for identity thieves.

2. **I want to encourage the widespread adoption of Bitcoin as a payment technology.** The entire parasitic financial class must be reformed or destroyed. A good way to kill something is to cut off its air supply. When you use credit cards a big cut goes to banks. Why enrich what you hate? Bitcoin, and its brethren, will help suffocate traditional banks and their despicable government cronies.
3. **The era of government backed legal tender is drawing to an end.** Money is way to important to allow governments to control it. Abominations like the Federal Reserve are as obsolete and morally repugnant as slavery.

To help bring about the glorious day when shitheads in government no longer *create money out of thin fucking nothing* and give it to their bum buddies I am encouraging all of you to start using cryptocurrencies. [You can start by tipping moi!](#)

JOD Update: J 8.02 QT/JHS/64 bit Systems

Posted: 14 Jun 2014 22:29:17



I have pushed out a [JOD update](#) that makes it possible to run the addon on J 8.02 systems. In the last eight months a [QT](#) based [J IDE](#) has been developed that runs on Linux, Windows and Mac platforms. To maintain JOD's compatibility across all versions of J from 6.02 on I had to tweak a few verbs.

The only significant changes are how JOD interacts with various J system editors. I have tested the system on Windows J 6.02, J 7.01, J 8.02, and Mac J 7.01 systems. I expect it will behave on 32 and 64 bit Linux systems from J 7.01 on, but I have yet to test these setups. My hardware budget limits my ability to run common variants of Windows, Linux and Mac systems.

JOD is still not complete; that's why the version number has not been bumped past 1.0.0. The missing features are noted in the table of contents of [jod.pdf](#), (also available in the [joddocument addon](#)), with the suffix "NIMP," which means "not implemented." I will fill in these blanks as I need them. Most of the time JOD meets my needs so don't hold your breath.

If you want to make your own additions to JOD [the program](#) and [documentation source](#) is available on GitHub. Just follow the links and enjoy.

As a last note: I will be at the [J Conference in Toronto \(July 24 and 25, 2014\)](#) where I will be giving a short presentation and handing out a few hardcopy versions of the JOD manual to one or two JOD fans.

Parsing the Bitcoin Genesis Block with J

Posted: 04 Jul 2014 00:33:11

The [genesis block](#) is the first block on the [Bitcoin blockchain](#). Satoshi Nakamoto, the mysterious entity that created Bitcoin, mined the genesis block on January 3, 2009. It's been five years since the genesis block's birth and Satoshi [is still unknown](#), Bitcoin is bigger than ever, and the blockchain is longer than 300,000 blocks and growing.

One of the most important features of the blockchain is its immutability. After the Bitcoin network accepts a block and adds it to the blockchain *it can never be altered*. This makes Bitcoin blocks rare durable binary artifacts. The cryptographic hash algorithms that underpin the Bitcoin protocol enforce block immutability. If someone decides to tinker with a block, say maliciously flip a single bit, the block's hash will change and the network will reject it. This is what makes it almost impossible to counterfeit Bitcoins. Bitcoins have been lost and stolen but they have never been successfully counterfeited. This sharply contrasts with funny money like the US dollar that is [so routinely and brazenly counterfeited](#) that many suspect the US government turns a blind eye.

The exceptional durability of Bitcoin blocks, coupled with the mysterious origins of Bitcoin, makes the genesis block one of the most intriguing and important byte runs in the world. This post was inspired by the now defunct post [285 bytes that changed the world](#). I would love to give you a link but this post has vanished. A secondary, but excellent reference is John Ratcliff's [How to Parse the Bitcoin BlockChain](#). I am adapting John's nomenclature in what follows.

When programmers start exploring Bitcoin they often cut their teeth on parsing the genesis block. If you Google "blockchain parsing" you'll find examples in dozens of programming languages. The most popular are C, C++, Java, PHP, C#, JavaScript, and the rest of the mainstream suspects. What you will not find, until now, are J examples.

So what does J bring to the table that makes *yet another genesis block parser* worth a look? Let's take a look at Bitcoin addresses. The following is the Bitcoin address of this blog's tip jar. Feel free to send as many Satoshis and full Bitcoins as you like to this address.

```
tip=. '17MfYvFqSyeZcy7nKMbFrStFmmvaJ143fA'
```

There is nothing deep or mysterious about this funny string of letters; it's just a plain old number in [Bitcoin base 58](#) clothing. So, what is this number in standard format? Here's how it's calculated with J.

```
BASE58=. '123456789ABCDEFGHJKLMNPQRSTUVWXYZabcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz'  
dfb58=. 58x #. BASE58 i. ]  
  
dfb58 tip  
170961889665498546072642291112500711652231559804656492485
```

The second line that defines `dfb58`, (decimal from base 58), is the complete J program! That's it folks. You can troll the internet for days looking at base 58 to big integer converters and it's unlikely you will find a shorter or more elegant conversion program. Not only is the J version short and sweet it's also fast and versatile. Suppose you wanted to convert ten thousand Bitcoin addresses. The following converts ten thousand copies of `tip`.

```
dfb58 10000 # ,: tip  
170961889665498546072642291112500711652231559804656492485 17096188966549854607264...
```

At this point [fanboys](#) of mainstream programming languages typically pipe up with something like, "changing number encodings is inherently trivial; what about something more demanding like going the other way, say converting Bitcoin public keys to the base 58 address format?"

The public key in the genesis block is encoded in what many call the "challenge script." Here is the genesis block's challenge script in hex.

```
41 04 67 8A FD B0 FE 55 48 27 19 67 F1 A6 71 30 B7 10 5C D6
A8 28 E0 39 09 A6 79 62 E0 EA 1F 61 DE B6 49 F6 BC 3F 4C EF
38 C4 F3 55 04 E5 1E C1 12 DE 5C 38 4D F7 BA 0B 8D 57 8A 4C
70 2B 6B F1 1D 5F AC
```

Public keys take a number of forms in the blockchain. John Ratcliff's post summarizes the many forms you will run into. The genesis block uses the 65 byte [ECDSA](#) form. Converting this form to base 58 requires taking [SHA-256](#) and [RIPEMD-160](#) hashes. These hashes are available in [OpenSSL](#) which is conveniently distributed with [J 8.02 JQT](#). Here's how to convert the genesis block's public key to base 58 with J.

```
load 'c:/bitjd/scripts/sslhash.ijs'

Base58frKey65=:3 : 0

NB.*Base58frKey65 v-- 65 byte public Bitcoin key bytes to base 58.
NB.
NB. monad: clB58 =. Base58frKey65 clBytes

ekey=. (0{a.) , sr160 s256 y
csum=. 4 {. s256 s256 ekey
Base58Check ekey,csum
)

Base58frKey65 }. }: ChallengeScript
1A1zP1eP5QGefi2DMPTfTL5SLmv7DivfNa
```

The `ChallengeScript` noun holds the bytes given in hex above. The verbs `sr150`, `s256` and `Base58Check` are available in the J scripts [sslhash](#) and [ParseGenesisBlock](#) that I have put in the [jacks](#) repository on GitHub.

The following J verb `ParseGenesisBlock` reads the first [full node](#) Bitcoin block file and then extracts and checks the genesis block. `ParseGenesisBlock` tests the various verbs, (functions), it employs. As a side effect it clearly describes the layout of the genesis block and provides test data for anyone that's interested.

If this post piques your curiosity about J a good place to start learning about the language is the recently released [New Dictionary of J](#). You can download a version of J for Windows, Linux, OS/X, IOS, and Android at [Jsoftware's](#) main site.

```

ParseGenesisBlock=:3 : 0

NB.*ParseGenesisBlock v-- parse and check Bitcoin genesis block.
NB.
NB. monad: clMsg =. ParseGenesisBlock clBlockFile
NB.
NB.   file=. 'c:/bitjd/blocks/blk00000.dat'
NB.   ParseGenesisBlock file

NB. fetch genesis block data
dat=. read y

NB. first 4 bytes are "sort of" block delimiters
MagicID=: (i. offset=. 4) { dat
'MagicID mismatch' assert 'F9BEB4D9' -: ,hfd a. i. MagicID

NB. next 4 bytes gives following block length
offset=. offset + 4 [ BlockLength=: _2 ic (offset + i. 4) { dat
'BlockLength mismatch' assert 285 = BlockLength

NB. next 4 bytes block format version - has changed
offset=. offset + 4 [ VersionNumber=: _2 ic (offset + i. 4) { dat

NB. next 32 bytes is previous block hash - genesis block
NB. has no previous hash and all bytes are set to 0
offset=. offset + 32 [ PreviousBlockHash=: (offset + i. 32) { dat
'PreviousBlockHash mismatch' assert (32#0) -: a. i. PreviousBlockHash

NB. next 32 bytes is the Merkle tree root hash
offset=. offset + 32 [ MerkleRoot=: (offset + i. 32) { dat
grh=. '3BA3EDFD7A7B12B27AC72C3E67768F617FC81BC3888A51323A9FB8AA4B1E5E4A'
'MerkleRoot mismatch' assert grh -: ,hfd a. i. MerkleRoot

NB. next 4 bytes is a unix epoch timestamp - rolls over 7th feb 2106
NB. there is no timezone information - it is interpreted as utc
offset=. offset + 4 [ TimeStamp=: _2 ic (offset + i. 4) { dat
'TimeStamp mismatch' assert 2009 1 3 18 15 5 -: ,tsfrunixsecs TimeStamp

NB. next 4 bytes represents block target difficulty
offset=. offset + 4 [ TargetDifficulty=: _2 ic (offset + i. 4) { dat
'TargetDifficulty mismatch' assert 486604799 = TargetDifficulty

NB. next 4 bytes is a random number nonce
offset=. offset + 4 [ Nonce=: (offset + i. 4) { dat
'Nonce mismatch' assert '1DAC2B7C' -: ,hfd a. i. Nonce

```

```

NB. next 1 to 9 bytes is the transaction count stored as a variable length integer
NB. see: https://en.bitcoin.it/wiki/Protocol\_specification#Variable\_length\_integer
offset= offset + vlen [ 'vlen TransactionCount'=: vint (offset + i. 9) { dat
'TransactionCount mismatch' assert TransactionCount = 1 NB. (*)=. vlen

NB. next 4 bytes transaction version number
offset= offset + 4 [ TransactionVersionNumber=: _2 ic (offset + i.4) { dat
'TransactionVersionNumber mismatch' assert 1 = TransactionVersionNumber

NB. next 1 to 9 bytes is the number of transaction inputs
offset= offset + vlen [ 'vlen TransactionInputNumber'=: vint (offset + i. 9) { dat

NB. next 32 bytes is the hash of the input transaction
offset= offset + 32 [ TransactionHash=: (offset + i. 32) { dat
'TransactionHash mismatch' assert (32#0) -: a. i. TransactionHash

NB. next 4 bytes is the input transaction index
offset= offset + 4 [ TransactionIndex=: _2 ic (offset + i. 4) { dat
'TransactionIndex mismatch' assert _1 = TransactionIndex

NB. input script length is next
offset= offset + vlen [ 'vlen InputScriptLength'=: vint (offset + i. 9) { dat
'InputScriptLength mismatch' assert 77 = InputScriptLength

NB. script data
InputScript=: (offset + i. InputScriptLength) { dat
offset= offset + InputScriptLength

NB. sequence number 4 bytes
offset= offset + 4 [ SequenceNumber=: ,hfd a. i. (offset + i. 4) { dat
'SequenceNumber mismatch' assert 'FFFFFFFF' -: SequenceNumber

NB. output count 1 to 9 bytes
offset= offset + vlen [ 'vlen OutputCount'=: vint (offset + i.9) { dat

NB. output value - number of satoshis sent
offset= offset + 8 [ OutputSatoshis=: (offset + i.8) { dat
NB. 64 bit unsigned integer
'OutputSatoshis mismatch' assert '00F2052A01000000' -: ,hfd a. i. OutputSatoshis
OutputSatoshis=: ]`(_3&ic)@.IF64 OutputSatoshis

NB. challenge script length
offset= offset + vlen [ 'vlen ChallengeScriptLength'=: vint (offset + i.9) { dat
'ChallengeScriptLength mismatch' assert 67 = ChallengeScriptLength

```

```

NB. challenge script - contains elliptic curve signatures
ChallengeScript=: (offset + i. ChallengeScriptLength) { dat
offset=. offset + ChallengeScriptLength
cscript=. ,hfd a. i. ChallengeScript
'ChallengeScript mismatch' assert GenesisBlockChallengeScript -: cscript

NB. challenge script is 67 bytes drop first and last byte to
NB. compute the familiar Bitcoin base 58 address - compare with block explorer
NB. http://blockexplorer.com/block/
NB. 000000000019d6689c085ae165831e934ff763ae46a2a6c172b3f1b60a8ce26f
OutputAddress=: Base58frKey65 }. }: ChallengeScript
'Genesis Block address mismatch' assert GenesisBlockOutputAddress -: OutputAddress

NB. last 4 bytes lock time
TransactionLockTime=: (offset + i.4) { dat
'TransactionLockTime mismatch' assert 0 0 0 0 -: a. i. TransactionLockTime

'Genesis Block Parsed and Checked'
)

```

JD Bitcoin Blockchain Spelunking

Posted: 25 Jul 2014 16:37:05

On July 25, 2014 I gave this short presentation about poking around the Bitcoin blockchain with [J at the 2014 J Conference](#) in Toronto Canada.



Click to view presentation

There will never be a Literature of Reality

Posted: 31 Aug 2014 20:20:13

The first job of the myth maker is to shrink the universe. The shrinkage occurs along all dimensions: time, space and mind. You see this everywhere. Immortal vampires and wizards are, at most, a few thousand years old: younger than many *real* trees. Grand science fiction star empires seldom span a single galaxy in a universe of hundreds of billions. Time travelers never set their machines to zero or infinity; they have no interest in creation or ultimate ends. The demigods, super AI's, and other transcendent beings brood unproductively, without original ideas, for millennia. Remember when Elrond reminisced about "being there" when Sauron was struck down three thousand Middle Earth years ago. In all that time the great, wise, and nearly immortal, elves of Middle Earth did not move beyond simple swords. How quickly the battle for Gondor would have gone with a few dozen [Abrams tanks](#) and a couple squadrons of [Warthogs](#).

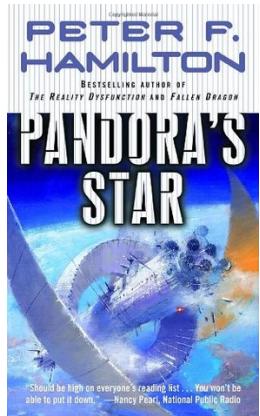
It's hard to fault human authors for shrinking the universe. The real universe, the utterly vast and ancient universe slowly discovered by modern science, is beyond all human scales. Imagine a book that devoted one word to every star in the observable universe. The number of stars in the observable universe is a unit that has a name. It's called a *Sagan* in honor of Carl Sagan. The Sagan is currently estimated to be around 7×10^{22} . Assuming there are one thousand words per page our book would have 7×10^{19} pages.

If we read nonstop at a rate of one hundred pages per hour it would take about 80 billion years, or six times the estimated age of the universe, to read this book. Yet, vast as this book is, it leaves out pretty much everything. There's no mention of the Earth or other planets: so many pages and not even a Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy's "[mostly harmless](#)." Reality overwhelms imagination. The magic of Harry Potter is piffle compared to cosmic inflation. [Haldane](#) was right. The universe is probably queerer than we can imagine and certainly deeper than we can grasp. Our meager fictions must float in serene little bubbles lest they overrun our short impatient lives. *There will never be a literature of reality.*

Pandora's Star: a Grand Sprawling Entertainment

Posted: 01 Sep 2014 21:00:56

In my fevered youth I was an avid fan of science fiction but as I crossed the Rubicon of middle age I read less and less of the genre. For years I preferred nonfiction: mostly science with a smattering of history and biography. Then, about five years ago, I started reading science fiction again.



What kept me away? Most of the authors of my youth had died: Heinlein, Clarke, Asimov, Bradbury, Anderson, Herbert and Dick – all gone! I had to find new – to me – authors. I knew and loved Neal Stephenson, the author of *Cryptonomicon*, *Diamond Age*, *Snow Crash*, and *Anathem*, but after four or five thousand pages of Neal it was time to move on. My first post Stephenson, new to me, author was Iain M. Banks.

Banks specialized in what's often called alien infested space opera. His universes are overflowing with life. Aliens are everywhere, inhabiting niches that most biologists would poo-poo as impossible. I prefer more empty and serene universes but Banks' books like *The Algebraist*, *Surface Detail*, and

Consider Phelbas whet my appetite for his crowded milieus. I was looking forward to following Banks for years but it wasn't to be. Iain M. Banks died of cancer, at the ridiculously premature age of 59, leaving fans all over the word wanting. There is no greater outrage than mortality!

After Banks' death I looked around for other operatic authors; it didn't take me long to find [Peter F. Hamilton](#) and [Pandora's Star](#). *Pandora's Star* is a huge, highly entertaining, example of what I call *restrained* science fiction.

Restraint is what separates science fiction from fantasy. Fantasy tolerates an anything goes mishmash of logical inconsistencies. Literature has a term for this: *Deus ex machina*. Modern fantasy is a veritable high-tech *Deux ex machina* factory churning out [beta-male](#) vampires that take implausible romantic interests in their food, prepubescent wizards jerking off in boarding school, (Oh it happened), fireproof maximum babes with pet dragons, and armies of oxymoronic brain-dead brain eating zombies. *Only scripture piles on more logical nonsense than fantasy.*

I enjoy fantasy as much as the next nerd but it's not science fiction. Proper restrained science fiction admits a small number of “magic suppositions” but otherwise rigorously adheres to what we know about physical reality. You need some damn science in your science fiction people. The universe of *Pandora's Star* presumes a few impossibilities;

it assumes wormholes and faster than light (FTL) travel. FTL is a standard plot enabling device. Civilizations spanning thousands of light years simply cannot exist, on human time scales, without it. *Pandora's Star* makes three more “impossible” assumptions which I will not divulge because ruining good books should be a capital crime. Aside from these allowed departures from reality the universe of *Pandora's Star* sticks to scientific bricks and unfolds with lovely consistency.

Most science fiction writers make impossible assumptions but great ones take them in unexpected directions. Consider wormholes. Wormholes have been a staple of science fiction forever. Three, not entirely restrained, [TV series](#) had contemporary soldiers marching through them every week for years. They've popped up in every two-bit tale that needed quick point A to B plumbing. Wormholes are a cliché and their presence often signals unimaginative hackery. If you're going to confront me with wormholes you better damn well show me something new or I'm outta your lame book. The opening chapter of *Pandora's Star* is one of the most humorous and imaginative use of wormholes in science fiction. A few pages later Hamilton sends trains through wormholes. It's [Sheldon Cooper's](#) wet dream: *trains in space*. I had to smile and keep on reading. *Pandora's Star* is a big book, almost one thousand pages, but like all great sprawling books it's too damn short. Fortunately, there's a second book, *Judas Unchained*, that keeps the story rolling. I haven't had this much fun with a science fiction since *Dune*. It's that good.

[Photospheres Away!](#)

Posted: 30 Oct 2014 16:53:30

Photographers are notorious gear-heads. Everybody has a favorite lens, camera or tripod and, no matter how much gear we have, more is always better! Hey, somebody has to stimulate the moribund Obama economy. Gear lust is not entirely irrational. Good cameras really do take “technically” better pictures than mediocre or poor cameras but here's the infuriating thing. Technical merit does not make the image!

Image quality depends of many things and changes over time. If you doubt this imagine you have an old locket that frames a [Daguerreotype](#) of your great-great-grandmother. I'd bet that every single portrait on your shiny new iPhone is “technically” superior to that old Daguerreotype but I'd also bet you'd chuck your iPhone before giving up that old Daguerreotype. An image's quality goes far beyond [MTF curves](#) and pixel counts. Photography and geometry are both bereft of royal roads.

In the early days of photography gear was a serious constraint. Getting a good

picture was a technical and artistic struggle. Imagine shooting a panorama using large glass plates covered with a home-brewed ASA 0.5, (you read that right ASA 0.5), blue light-sensitive emulsion. Despite such limitations early photographers managed to create some great images. Imagination and gumption have always been the most important photographic tools with good lenses as a distant third. Well, the 150 year reign of the lens has ended, *software has displaced the lens as the primary modern photographic tool* and [Google's Photosphere](#) cell phone application neatly demonstrates this technological shift.



I shot this panorama in the 1960's. I rotated in my grandfather's driveway shooting an entire roll of film with my Instamatic camera. Many years later I scanned the prints and used panorama software to stitch the images together. Click on the image for more panoramas.

A [photosphere](#) is a panorama on steroids. It's a complete 360 degree look around image. The Google photosphere app derives from Google Maps street view. Street views are shot with special multi-lens cameras that look everywhere at once but some bright spark in Google realized that you could get roughly the same result from a single lens if the photographer was willing to endure a vertigo inducing dance. Shooting a photosphere takes at least three twirling 360 degree passes. You have to shoot the ground, horizon and sky. It takes about twenty frames to build a photosphere.

There is nothing new about multi-frame panoramas. Photographers started shooting multi-frame panoramas [shortly after the camera's invention](#). I shot them when I was teenager. Panorama software isn't new either; it's been around for decades. Two "new" developments make photospheres possible: photosphere viewers and cameras, (cell phones), that are more software than camera.

The sphere cannot be mapped onto the plane without distortion. This mathematical fact limits how wide-angle your wide-angle shots can be before they are unnaturally

distorted. A flattened 360 degree view of common rectilinear subjects looks wonderfully, or horribly, weird: straight lines become curves and areas lose proportionality. Many natural vistas can tolerate such torments but average street views cannot. Photosphere viewers fix this problem by simulating how we look around. Every time you browse a Google street view you are running a photosphere viewer.



A photosphere at the top of a waterfall in Taum Sauk state park near Arcadia Missouri. Click for a 360 photosphere viewer.

Shooting panoramas and photospheres is like any other type of photography. It takes lots of practice! It was hard to “practice” shooting such images before cell phones could run stitching and viewing software because you couldn’t see what you had until you took your twenty frames back to the “lab” and tediously put them together. Ten years ago panorama software required a lot of manual intervention. I spent hours putting three or four frames together. I didn’t put a twenty frame panorama together until I snapped my first iPhone Photosphere.

The iPhone lens is a pretty crappy short focal length lens. Any decent camera lens easily outclasses it yet I cannot shoot photospheres with my expensive Nikon’s while my cruddy little cell phone can. What’s the difference? Software!

iPhone Google photospheres are fun but they’re flaw ridden. You can easily see stitching errors, blending artifacts, ghost people, and other blemishes. Now that we can shoot photospheres the race is on to shoot quality photospheres! Software will dominate but hardware has to catch up to make this happen. Before long you will be able to buy a special multi-lens photosphere ball camera that you can literally throw into the air. This ought to fix the viewpoint problem for people with good pitching arms and the rest of us can drop the little sucker from a drone. Photospheres away!



A photosphere on the grounds of the Museum of Transportation in Saint Louis Missouri. Click for a 360 photosphere viewer.



The Panono ball camera is a small multi-lens camera that shoots 360 photospheres by simultaneously capturing images from all its lens and stitching the result together. It is designed to be thrown into the air. Photosphere baseball is going to be huge!

I Voted for Nothing

Posted: 04 Nov 2014 13:48:02

I have just returned from another biannual exercise in futility: voting in mid-term US elections. Once again my preferred candidate, *none of the above*, was not on the ballot; so, once again, I held my nose and did my best to sabotage the fetid dreams of the rotting things that were. Any barely sentient ape knows that voting, especially in the corrupt US system, is almost a complete waste of time. The choices we're presented with have been exquisitely gamed by armies of conniving manipulative hacks all hell-bent on *not asking the important questions*.

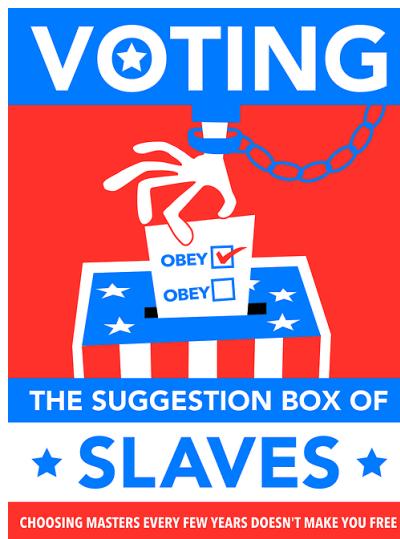
Behold your ballot: the primary process purged principled people leaving a scummy residue of stunted subhuman choices. Most are ignorant delusional leftists, grasping smarmy right-wing car salesmen, or outright apolitical narcissist psychopaths. I wouldn't cross the street to pee on any of them. Where are assassins when you need them?

As bad as voting is the alternative, despotic rule, is still worse so I always haul my cynically enlightened ass to the polls and do what I can to erect roadblocks. I always

vote for divided government by carefully selecting bitter opposites. I will vote for Democrats, Republicans, Libertarians, Independents, even Communists and Greens provided I can pit them against someone they detest, abhor, loathe, hate, and want dead on the other side. I want to minimize agreement and maximize conflict because conflict always results in doing nothing, and nine times out of ten, *doing nothing is vastly superior to political something*. So, until we get some qualified candidates – don’t make me laugh it hurts; it’s critical to vote in people who want to smash in their opponents heads.

The original republican design of the US government recognized the fundamental importance of doing nothing and divided government into three coequal branches to prevent the political class from doing things just for the hell of it! This basic design has degenerated into an out-of-control executive, a cowardly self-serving congress, a swamped navel gazing judiciary, and an ever-expanding underachieving overpaid bureaucracy that *fills in the details on massive template laws* like Obamacare. It doesn’t take much of a constitutional scholar to see that this is not what the originators intended. Today we endure a massive, bloated, expensive, inept, corrupt and stupid government run by simpletons, parasites, and criminals.

Fortunately for us, government isn’t nearly as important as political assholes of all stripes think it is! As long as ordinary citizens *can buy off and safely ignore government* they will tolerate its existence. So keep doing nothing boys and girls; it will keep your heads off the bloody spikes you probably deserve.



Incoherent Interstellar

Posted: 11 Nov 2014 03:26:18



Don't look for plot points in Black Holes!

Christopher Nolan has made some excellent commercially successful films like [Inception](#), [The Dark Knight](#), and [Mememto](#). When word got out that he was working on a *serious* science fiction film expectations got out of hand. Those of us old enough to remember the first screenings of 2001 thought maybe, just maybe, we might see something comparable to Kubrick's masterpiece. Well I am sorry to report that Interstellar is no [2001](#); it's not even a [Blade Runner](#) or Nolan's own Inception. Interstellar is a giant, moderately entertaining, incoherent mess.

Much has been made of [Kip Thorne's](#) involvement with Interstellar. The Black Hole depicted in Interstellar is based on General Relativity calculations. Apparently the CGI animators uncovered something unexpected in how a spinning Black Hole drags light around it. We are told the Black Hole in Interstellar is the [most technically accurate ever seen in the movies](#). Unfortunately, it's the only technically accurate part of the whole damn movie.

There is no point going over the [boners](#) in Interstellar. They are numerous, annoying, glaring, and embarrassing. If you must torture yourself the [Bad Astronomer](#) has catalogued Intersellar's most egregious violations. Now I know what you're thinking. John, it's a freaking sci-fi movie, lighten up! You're going on like a character on the [Big Bang Theory](#).

My answer to such ankle biters is simple. Science fiction is as an *Art Form*. An art form has two equal components: art and form! Art, without form, is usually effete garbage, and form, without art, is an income tax return. Greatness only emerges when the two are in perfect balance. The first step in achieving balance is honoring the basic elements of the form. So what are the basic elements of the *serious science fiction* form?

I've [gone over this](#) before but clearly you weren't paying attention. Serious science fiction differs from fantasy in the way it treats reality. Serious science fiction *is allowed a few departures* from physical reality. You can assume wormholes connect different parts of the universe and that it's possible to safely traverse them but that's it cowboy! Outside of wormholes it's physics as usual! This is the science part in science fiction. Great science fiction strictly follows this mandate. Take 2001, the

exemplar of how this is done, anything non-obelisk related in 2001, including HAL 9000, is completely and absolutely plausible. The obelisk is the singular departure from reality in 2001.

Interstellar bombs because it often departs from physical reality for the basest of reasons: advancing a clunky nap inducing plot. I cannot abide such transgressions. It's like watching a prima donna ballerina stop in the middle of Swan Lake, drop her tutu, and take a dump on stage. Now prima donna dumps may be entertaining but they're not ballet. Similarly, Interstellar has its [good parts](#) but it's not serious science fiction. In my opinion Interstellar is a bigger disappointment than [Transcendence](#) and it makes we wonder if anyone in Hollyweird is capable of making serious science fiction these days.

Ferguson and Dark Matter

Posted: 26 Nov 2014 06:44:07

For the last month the big story here in St. Louis has been Ferguson. At least that's what media hucksters have sold as the big story. You will have to excuse me my interests rarely align with "the news." I don't watch broadcast TV, listen to the radio, or *pay* for newspapers. Despite my media starvation diet I am better informed than broadcast addicts. What's my secret?

Everyday I *read* scores of news stories from many Internet sources. When I gave up broadcasting I worried that I might miss something. Actually the exact opposite has occurred. I usually learn of things long before they are "discussed" in main stream outlets. Contemporary broadcasters remind me of short wave Radio Moscow transmissions in the 1970s. Radio Moscow was an insipid utterly predictable propaganda outlet. Listening to what they said was unnecessary. I could predict with nearly 100% accuracy what their slant on any topic would be. They only surprised me *by what they didn't cover*. *With propaganda only silence is news*. I bet you feel the same about broadcasters you despise. Is it really necessary to listen to MSNBC, FOX, BBC or the CBC? Their ideological positions are as predictable as Radio Moscow. If your news is not surprising it's not news; it's noise.

Ferguson is a classic case of surprise free news. Everyone agrees that a white police officer shot and killed a black teenager. Such a lovely bare-bones tableau invites creative interpretation and that's exactly what we got. There are hundreds of *predictable* Ferguson authorities. You can Google any viewpoint you want. What's lacking in all the hysteria is what skeptics call *reliable data*.

To me the officer's guilt is similar to your favorite type of Dark Matter. The case for Dark Matter is very strong. Something out there is undeniably affecting the rotation and formation of galaxies. Similarly, in Ferguson we have a dead teenager and a literal smoking gun. Now pay attention; this is where we separate skeptically informed thought from raving ideological demagoguery. The case for Dark Matter is strong but the case for particular types of Dark Matter is close to nonexistent. Detection experiments are ongoing, inconclusive or outright failures. Yeah, the Dark Matter science is not settled. Similarly, the case for the officer's guilt is far from ironclad. Perhaps that explains the grand jury's verdict. If you disagree offer *incontrovertible* evidence.

Of course missing incontrovertible evidence is never a problem for people who have made up their minds. People believe all sorts nonsense, ghosts, demons, past lives, central banking efficacy, but, as I often say, "belief is a bullshit word; you know or you don't know." If you cannot mount a rigorous case that withstands the harshest and meanest of skeptics please calm down and refrain from looting and arson.



Mahin standing beside a reflecting pool in Iran. This picture was taken long before I met her. My wife was still a school girl in Tehran.

2015

Mahin and Carl

Posted: 08 Feb 2015 20:59:53

On the very memorable date of New Year's Eve my wife's mother Mahin died. From now on the dropping ball will remind us of her. Mahin had a long and honorable life. She was loved by children, grandchildren, and in-laws. She was the calm matriarch in the storm of her family. I met her late in life after marrying her daughter Mali. Mahin was almost eighty then and still living on her own. She liked me and regretted having a son-in-law that she couldn't talk to. In the 1980s Mahin followed her children out of the chaos of Khomeini's revolutionary Iran. She settled in Canada in her late sixties taking on a new country, a foreign language and a new way of life. It would have been a big change for a young person but for someone of Mahin's age it was almost heroic. She got on, adjusted, learned enough English to function, but not enough to properly talk to son-in-laws, and enjoyed life. She never manifested a trace of bitterness or self-pity. She was a strong woman.

In her later years Mahin suffered from dementia. Her children took turns helping her out. We were the last to look after her. She lived with us for nearly two years. Mahin and I had similar tastes for the absurd. We both enjoyed the idiotic television show [Wipeout](#). Being knocked on your ass works equally well in English and Farsi. We'd laugh at people plunging into gigantic vats of goo. Dementia slowly ate away at

Mahin's mind. Eventually she required twenty-four care and her daughters placed her in a nursing home in Toronto. They agonized over putting her in a home and did what they could to make her life comfortable. Mali stayed with her sister Sedi in Toronto five months last year to look after Mahin. She went to the nursing home every day to feed her, give her baths, do her laundry and talk to her. Dementia claimed Mahin's English. Nursing home staff could not talk to her or understand her. Mali and her sisters were very fortunate to find a sitter that spoke Farsi. Hiring nursing home sitters is more common than you would think. Many of the residents in Mahin's home had sitters.

Mahin died surrounded by children, grandchildren, her sitter, and nursing home staff. Home staff told my wife and her sisters that everyone loved Mahin. I am sure they tell many families something similar but having known Mahin I don't doubt their sincerity. Mahin was a sweet dignified lady to her last breath.

A week before Mahin died I learned from my ex-wife that Carl, an old mutual friend, was in a Calgary hospice and not expected to live out the month. I'm not a particularly friendly person. Oh, I'm pleasant enough and can, when motivated, skillfully navigate social milieus. If you work with me you might even think I am your friend. I'm not! I'm reluctant to form deep friendships. Entering my sixties I can count my real friends on my fingers. Carl was the best friend I ever had. For nearly twenty years, from high school, until the birth of my daughter, Carl was a happy presence in my life.

Carl was a happy presence in the lives of everyone that got to know him and could tolerate his manifold eccentricities. He was everyone's crazy uncle and he relished the role. Since leaving western Canada I moved out of Carl's orbit. We'd trade the odd letter, email, and in recent years, Facebook posts. On the few times that I passed through Calgary I'd always look him up. We'd fall right back into old days blithering. Hearing that he was dying of the nasty form of prostate cancer was a jolt.

Mali petitioned me to call him right away. "You better call before it's too late."

I was reluctant because I don't know what to say to the dying. I missed saying goodbye to my paternal grandfather and I botched my last conversation with my mother. Christopher Hitchens recounts some of the awkward conversations he had with friends and colleagues while dying of cancer in his last book [Mortality](#). Many avoided the sword overhead while others swung it callously. Hitchens didn't know what to feel. None of their goodbyes really helped.

I called Carl more for myself than him. Carl took a few moments to recall who I



Carl in his card counting days. He cashed in retirement savings to play Black-Jack in Vegas. He was a very good friend but not exactly your financial go to guy.

was. He was understandably more depressed than I had ever heard him. He was also vague and struggling to respond. Pain medications dull more than pain. I asked if family and friends were about. We aren't comfortable with people dying alone which is strange because no matter how many friends and family members surround us we all die alone. The only hint of the old Carl that came out our chat was when he referred to Nazar: a very old friend that we both enjoyed making fun of. Before hanging up I told Carl I would check in on him later but later never came. He died less than two weeks later.

Death is the most serious thing that will ever happen to us. It forecloses on what's next. We simply cease! There is no childish heaven or burning hell. We are not reincarnated and we don't see ghosts or talk to the dead. If you think or believe otherwise you are simply wrong. I won't argue with you. I am tired of your irrational objections, your contemptible myths, and your weakness in the face of oblivion. The human machine wears out and breaks down. We don't imagine afterlives for our cars so why do we indulge such fantasies for ourselves. As much as I would like to see Mahin, Carl, my mother, or anyone of the hundred billion people who have already died, again I won't and neither will you!

JOD Update: Version 0.9.97*

Posted: 22 Mar 2015 22:53:00

In the last year much has changed in the J world.

1. There are new [official J 8.0x](#) builds for all supported platforms.
2. The [QT](#) based IDE JDE has matured and is in widespread use.
3. The column oriented J database JD is drawing new users to J and enticing J veterans to reconsider how we use databases.
4. There is a small group of J system builders experimenting with additions, extensions and revisions of core J source code.



In short, there are have been enough changes to revisit and update JOD.

JOD version [0.9.97*](#)³⁵ is the first JOD update in many years that mocks the god of software compatibility. In particular:

1. The syntax of the `jodhelp` verb has changed.
2. The `jodsouce` addon no longer uses a zip file to distribute JOD dump files.
3. JOD online help will no longer be supported or updated.
4. Volume size is no longer checked before creating new JOD dictionaries.
5. There is a new version of `jod.pdf`.

jodhelp changes (#1, #3 and #5): `jodhelp` has always been a *kludge*. In programmer speak a kludge is some half-baked facility added to a system after more essential features have stabilized. The original versions of `jodhelp` pointed at my rough notes. It was all the “documentation” I needed! Then others started using JOD which resulted in an “evolved” online version of my notes. I originally thought that hosting my notes online would simultaneously serve user needs and cut the amount of time I spent maintaining documentation. In retrospect this *wasn’t even wrong!*

I used Google Documents to host my notes. If you’ve ever wondered why completely free Google Documents hasn’t obliterated expensive *Microsoft Word* or hoary old excellent *LATEX* I invite you to maintain a set of *long-duration-documents* with Google Documents. During `jodhelp`’s online lifetime the basic internal format of Google Documents changed in a *screw-your-old-documents* upgrade which forced me to spend days repairing broken hyper-links and reformatting. I was not amused; you still get what you pay for!

I originally choose Google Documents because of its alleged global accessibility. Sadly, Google Documents is now often blocked by corporate and national firewalls. Even

³⁵The version number is '*'ed because you are always a point release from done!

when it isn't blocked it renders like a dog peeing on a fire hydrant. All these problems forced me to rewrite JOD documentation with a completely reliable tool: good old-fashioned L^AT_EX. The result of my labors, [jod.pdf](#), is now distributed by the [joddocument](#) addon and is easily browsed with [jodhelp](#).

After [jod.pdf](#)'s appearance another irritant surfaced: synchronizing [jod.pdf](#) and the online version. I tried using [pandoc](#) and [markdown](#) to generate both the online and PDF versions from the same source files but [jod.pdf](#) is too complex for *not-to-fancy* portable approaches. I was faced with a choice, lower my [jod.pdf](#) standards, or get rid of something I never really liked. I opted to drown a child and abandon online help. I don't expect a lot of mourners at the funeral.

Using the new version of [jodhelp](#) requires installing the addon [joddocument](#) and configuring a J PDF reader. It's also good idea to define a JQT PF key to pop up JOD help with a keystroke. To configure a J PDF reader edit the configuration file:

```
~config/base.cfg
```

this file is directly available from the JQT `Edit\Configure` menu. `base.cfg` defines a number of operating system dependent utilities. Make changes to the systems you use, save your changes, and restart J. The following example shows my `Win64` system settings.

```
case. 'Win' do.  
  BoxForm=: 1  
  Browser=: 'c:/Program Files (x86)/Google/Chrome/Application/chrome.exe'  
  Browser_nox=: ''  
  EPSReader=: 'c:/program files/ghostgum/gsview/gsview64.exe'  
  PDFReader=: 'c:/uap/sumatra/SumatraPDF.exe'  
  XDiff=: 'c:/uap/WinMerge -2.14.0-exe/winmergeu.exe'  
  Editor=: 'c:/uap/notepad++/notepad++.exe %f'  
  Editor_nox=: ''
```

I use [SumatraPDF](#) to read PDF files on Windows. It's a fast, lightweight, program that efficiently renders [jod.pdf](#). Good PDF readers are available for all commonly used platforms.

To define JQT PK keys edit the configuration file:³⁶

```
~config/userkeys.cfg
```

³⁶`userkeys.cfg` is only available for J 8.03 systems.

This file is also directly available from the `Edit\Configure` menu. My JOD specific PF keys are:

```
F3;1;Require JOD;require 'general/jod'  
Shift+F3;1;JOD Help;jodhelp 0  
F6;1;Dev Dicts;od cut 'joddev jod utils' [ 3 od ''  
Shift+F6;1;Fit Dev Dicts;od cut 'jodfit joddev jod utils' [ 3 od ''  
Ctrl+Shift+F6;1;Test Dev Dicts;od cut 'jodtest joddev jod utils' [ 3 od ''
```

Pressing `Shift+F3` executes `jodhelp 0` which pops up JOD help.

jodsouce changes (#2): The `jodsouce` addon is a collection of JOD dump scripts. Dump scripts are serialized versions of binary JOD dictionaries. When executed they merge objects into the current JOD put dictionary. I use them primarily to move dictionaries around but they [have other uses](#) as well. Prior to this version I distributed the three main JOD development dump scripts, `joddev`, `jod`, and `utils` in one compressed zip file to reduce the size of [JAL](#) downloads.

The distributed script `jodsourcesetup.ij`s used the `zfiles` addon to extract these scripts and rebuild JOD development dictionaries. This worked on 32 bit Windows systems but failed elsewhere. J now runs on 32/64 bit Windows, Mac, Linux, IOS and Android systems. To better support all these variants I eliminated the `zfiles` dependency and pruned the JOD development dictionaries. The result is a more portable and smaller `jodsouce` addon.

Bye bye volume sizing (#4): Early versions of JOD ran in the now bygone era of floppy disks. It was possible to create *many* JOD dictionaries on a single standard 800 kilobyte 3.5 inch floppy. Compared to modern *porcine-ware* JOD, which many J'ers consider a *huge* system, is lithe and lean. In floppy days it was important to check if there was enough space on a floppy before creating another *huge 48K* empty JOD dictionary. This is a bit ridiculous today! If you don't have 48K free on whatever device you are running you have far more serious problems than not being able to create JOD dictionaries.

Volume sizing code remained in JOD for years until it started giving me problems. Returning the size of very large network volumes can be time-consuming and there are serious portability issues. Every operating system calls different facilities to return volume sizes. Even worse, security settings on corporate networks and cloud architectures sometimes refuse to divulge national secrets like free byte counts.

To eliminate all these headaches this version of JOD no longer checks volume size when the `FREESPACE` noun is zero. To restore the previous behavior you have to edit the file

```
~addons/general/jod.ijc`
```

and change the line `FREESPACE=:0` to whatever byte count you want. Alternatively, you could *NGAF*³⁷ and just assume you have 48K free on your terabyte size volumes.

Still to come: You may have surmised from JOD's version number that the system is still not *feature complete*. The JOD manual lists a few words that I am planning to implement. I only develop JOD when I need something or I am bored out of my mind at work and need a break. Such intermittent motivators seldom insure project completion but I have found a new reason to finish JOD. To list a book on [Goodreads](#) or Amazon you need an [ISBN number](#). The [hardcopy version](#) of the JOD manual is a *sort-of-published* book. To complete the publishing process I need an ISBN. If I am going to bother with such formalities I might as well complete the system the manual describes. So there you have it a new software development motivator: vanity.

Cutting the Stinking Tauntaun and other Adventures in Software Archeology

Posted: 12 Apr 2015 18:51:31

The other day a software project that I had spent a year on was “put on the shelf.” A year of effort was unceremoniously flushed down the software sewer. A number of colleagues asked me, “How do you feel about this?” Would you believe relieved?

This is not false bravado or stupid sunny optimism. I am not naive. I know this failure will hurt me. In modern corporations the parties that launch failures, usually management, seldom take the blame. Blame, like groundwater, sinks to the lowest levels. In software circles it pools on the coding grunts doing the real work. It's never said, but always implied, that software failures are the exclusive result of programmer flaws. If only we had worked harder and put in those sixty or eighty hour weeks for months at a time; if only we were a higher level of coding wizard that could crank out thousands of error free lines of code per hour, like the *entirely fictional* software geniuses on TV, things might have been different.

³⁷*Not Give a Fuck!*



Working with bad legacy code always reminds me of the scene in *The Empire Strikes Back* when Han Solo rescues Luke on the ice world by cutting open his fallen Tauntaun with a light saber. When the Tauntaun's guts spill out Solo says, "I thought they smelled bad on the outside." Legacy code may look pretty bad on the outside, just wait until you cut into it. Only then do you release the full foul forceful stench.

Indulging hypotheticals is like arguing with young Earth creationists about the distance of galaxies.

"Given the absolute constancy of the speed of light how is it possible to see the Andromeda galaxy, something we know is over two million light years away, in a six thousand-year old universe?"

The inevitable reply to this young Earth killing query is always something to the effect that God could have made the universe with light *en route*. God could have also made farts smell like Chanel #5 but sadly he³⁸ did not. Similarly, God has also failed to staff corporations with legions of Spock level programmers ready and willing to satisfy whatever *au courant* notion sets up brain-keeping in management skulls. The Andromeda galaxy is millions of light years away, we don't live on a six-thousand year old Earth, and software is not created by magic. Projects work or flounder for very real reasons. I was not surprised by the termination of this project. I was surprised that it took so long to give up on something that was never going to work out as expected.

The project, let's call it the *Stinking Tauntaun Project*, was an exercise in legacy system reformation. Our task was adding major new features to a hoary old system written in a programming language that resembles hieroglyphics. I know and regularly use half a dozen programming languages. With rare exceptions programming languages are more alike than different. From the time of Turing we have known that all programming languages are essentially the same. You can always implement one language in another; all programming systems exploit this fundamental equivalence. It's theoretically possible to compile SQL into JavaScript and run the resulting code on an eight bit interpreter written in ancient Batch; I just wouldn't recommend you

³⁸If you are the type of person that gets your panties in a knot about the *gender of hypothetical supreme beings* please go away.

start a SOX compliant software project to create such insanity. This goes double if only one programmer in your organization knows ancient Batch! The Stinking Tauntaun Project wasn't this crazy but there were clear signs that we were setting out on what has been accurately described as a [Death March](#).

Avoiding Death Marches, or finding ways to shift blame for them, is an essential survival skill for young corporate programmers. It's not an exaggeration to say that a lot of modern software is built on the naiveté of the young. When you first learn to program you are seduced by its overpowering rationality. Here is a world founded on logic, mathematics and real engineering constraints. Things work, and don't work, for non-bullshit reasons! There aren't any pointless arguments with ideological metrosexual pinheads about "privilege" or "gender." Programs don't give a crap about the skin color of the programmer or whether their mother was an abusive bull dyke. After a few years of inhaling rarefied logic fumes young programmers often make the gigantic and catastrophic mistake that the greater naked ape society in which they live also works on bullshit free principles. It's at this delicate stage when you can drive the young programmer hard. There's an old saying that salesmen like money and engineers like work so in most companies the salesmen get the money and the engineers get the work. As the great sage Homer Simpson would say, "It's funny because it's true!"

Death Marches shatter the naive. Gaining a greater understanding of the nasty world we live in always does a naked ape good but there's a cost; your career will suffer and you will suffer: enlightenment is proportional to pain! The *school of hard knocks* is a real thing and unlike that party school that you boozed through no one graduates alive. I'd strongly recommend a few Death Marches for every working programmer. To paraphrase Tolstoy, "All successful software projects are alike; every unsuccessful project fails in its own way!" You may consider what follows my modest contribution to the vast, comprehensively ignored, literature of software Death Marches.

Code Smell #1: A large mass of poorly written test free legacy code that does something important.

"Refactoring" is a word that [I love to mock](#) but the refactoring literature showcases an astonishingly precise term: "[code smell](#)." Code smells are exactly what you expect. Something about the code stinks. The Stinking Tauntaun code base didn't just stink, it reeked like diuretic dog shit on choleric vomit. This was well-known throughout the company. My general advice to young programmers that catch a whiff of rotting code is simple: flee, run, abort, get out of Dodge! Do not spill your [precious bodily](#)

[fluids](#) cleaning up the messes of others.

When recruited a number of experienced hieroglyphic programmers asked me the pointed question, “How do you deal with giant stinking piles of legacy doo-doo?” Maybe it wasn’t quite phrased like that but the intention was clear. They were telling me that they were dealing with a seething mass of half-baked crappy code that somehow, despite its manifold flaws, was useful to the organization and couldn’t be put out of its well deserved misery.

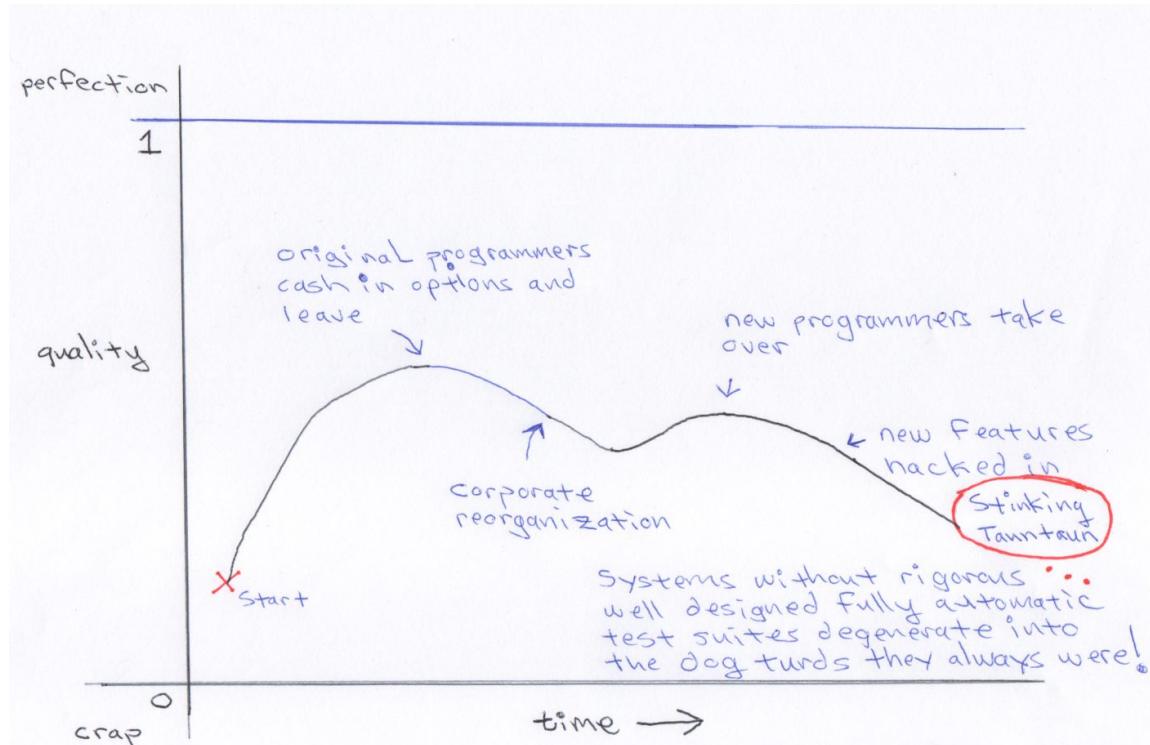
I honestly answered. “Systems that have survived for many years, despite their problems and flaws, meet a need. You have to respect that.” I still believe this! Every day I boot up ancient command shells that look pretty much like they did thirty years ago. Why do I use these old tools? It’s simple; they do key tasks very efficiently. I try new tools all the time. I spent a few months playing with PowerShell. It’s a very slick modern shell but it has one big problem. It takes far longer to load than ancient DOS or Bash shells. When I want to execute a few simple commands I find the few extra seconds it takes to get a PowerShell up and running highly annoying. Why should I wait when I don’t need the wonderful new features of PowerShell? The Stinking Tauntaun System also met user needs and, just like I am horrified by the clunky ill-conceived incoherence of old shells, Stinking Tauntaun users held their noses and used [the good bits](#) of what’s overall a bad system.

Code Smell #2: No fully automatic version controlled test suite.

There is a tale, possibly apocryphal, from the dawn of programming that goes something like this: a young programmer of the [ENIAC](#) generation was having a bad day. He was trying to get some program running and was getting frustrated “re-wiring.” Our young programmer was experiencing one of the first “debugging” sessions back when [real insects](#) came into play. In a moment of life searing insight our young programmer realized that from now on most of his time would be consumed hunting down errors in faulty programs. The tale goes dark here. I’ve often wondered what happened to the young programmer. Did he have a happy life or did he, like Sisyphus, push that damn program up the hill only to have it crash down again, and again, until management cried stop!

Debugging is a necessary evil. If you program — you debug. It’s impossible to eliminate debugging but at least you can approach it intelligently, and to this day, the only successful method for controlling program errors is the *fully automatic version controlled ever-expanding test suite*. Systems with such suites actually improve with time. Systems without such suites always degenerate and take down a few naive

programmers as they decay. The Stinking Tauntaun System lacked an automatic test suite. The Stinking Tauntaun System lacked a *non-automatic test suite*. At project inception The Stinking Tauntaun System had no useful test cases what so ever! Testing The Stinking Tauntaun was more painful than dealing with its code. The primary tester had nightmares about The Stinking Tauntaun.



My *Power-Point-less* illustration of Quality over Time for a system that lacks a *fully automatic ever expanding version controlled test suite*. Systems without well designed test rigs are almost without exception complete crap. Unless someone is paying you huge bucks it's best to start sending out resumes when asked to fix such systems. You can ruin your health stirring your yummy ice cream into the shit but it's almost certain the final mixture will taste more like shit than ice cream.

It's the 21st century people! In ENIAC days you could overlook missing automatic test suites. Nowadays *missing automatic test suites is a damning indictment of the organization that tolerates such heinous crimes against programming humanity!*

Code Smell #3: Only one programmer is able to work with legacy code.

When I was hired there were a few hieroglyphic programmers on staff. No single programmer was saddled with the accumulated mistakes of prior decades. We could divide and deal with the pain. During this happy time our work was support oriented. We we're not undertaking large projects. Then an inevitable bout of corporate reorganization occurred, followed by terminations and a stream of defectors fleeing the new order. Eventually only one hieroglyphic programmer remained: *moi!* Most programmers would have joined the exodus and not taken on the *sins of other fathers* but as I have already pointed out I am a software whore and proud of it. Still even software sluts must avoid ending up like the, "there can be only one," Highlander. Most of those sword duels [ended rather badly](#) as I recall.

Code Smell #4: Massive routines with far-ranging name scope.

With noxious fumes already cutting off our air supply we should have stopped in our tracks but we soldiered on because The Stinking Tauntaun System did something important and alternatives were not readily available. The corporation recognized this and started a number of parallel projects to explore New Stinking Tautaun's. I wasn't lucky enough to work on any of the parallel projects. I had to get in the stall and shovel the Tauntaun manure.

We weren't entirely clueless when we started Stinking Tauntaun work. We recognized the precarious hieroglyphic programmer resource constraint and tried to divide the work into units that alleviated it. We decided to implement part of the new features in another programming language and call the new module from the old system. The hope was this would divide the work and possibly create something that might be used outside The Stinking Tauntaun System. This part of the project went reasonably well. The new module is entirely new code and works very well. Unfortunately, it was a small part of the greater effort of bolting new features into The Stinking Tauntaun System.

Stinking Tauntaun code is magisterial in its monolithic madness. The hieroglyphic programming language is famous for its concise coding style yet the main routine in the Stinking Tauntaun System is close to 10,000 lines long! I had never seen hieroglyphic language routines of such length. I've only seen comparable programs a few times in my battle scared career. As a summer student I marveled at a 20,000 line, single routine, FORTRAN program. At first I thought it was the output of some cross compiler but no, some insane, bat shit crazy government drone, (I was working for a government agency in western Canada), had coded it by hand — on freaking punch cards no less! Such stunning ineptitude is rare: most programmers

have a passing acquaintance with modular design and know enough to reconsider things when code gets out of hand. We all have different thresholds for judging *out-of-hand-ness*, for me it's any routine that's longer than sixty lines: including the damn comments.

A 10,000 line routine is a monumental red flag but The Stinking Tautaun's length was not the biggest problem. There is this thing programmer's call "scope." Scope marks out name boundaries. It sets limits on where names have meaning or value. Ideally name scope is limited to the smallest feasible extent. You really don't want global names! You absolutely don't want global names like "x," or "i," or "t," cavorting in your code! Most of the cryptic names in the Stinking Tauntaun System had far-ranging scope. Vast scopes make it difficult to safely make local changes. This makes it risky, dangerous and time-consuming to change code. Large scopes also increase the burden on testers. If tiny changes have far-ranging consequences you have to retest large parts of the system every time you tweak it. All of this sucks up time and drains the pure bodily fluids of IT staff.

Code Smell #5: Assumptions about what is possible quickly prove wrong.

It was looking dark. Timid souls would have run but we plowed on. Our naive hope rested on the theory that we could change a few touch points in The Stinking Tauntaun's code base and then get out of Dodge before the dark kludge forest closed in. My first estimate of how many routines I would have to touch was around twenty. Two months into the project I had already altered over a hundred with no end in sight. The small orthogonal change we hoped to make was not possible because The Stinking Tauntaun System did not sensibly do one thing in one place. It did *sort of the same thing* in many places. You couldn't make a small change and have things sensibly flow throughout the system. I worked to isolate and modularize the mess but I should have just waved my hands and spent my days on LinkedIn looking for another job.

Code Smell #6: A development culture steeped in SOX inspired counter-productive ceremony.

On top of all these screeching sirens yelling stop there were other impediments. I work in a SOX saturated environment. Readers of my blog know that I consider SOX to be one of the biggest time-wasting piles of DC idiocies ever pushed on American companies. Like many "government solutions" SOX did not drain the intended swamp

but forever saddled us with inane time-wasting ceremony and utterly stupid levels of micromanagement. Is Active Directory management really a concern of freaking government? Somehow it's become one! One of my favorite consequences of SOX is the religious ordering of development environments and the sacraments for promoting code changes. During the long bruising Stinking Tauntaun project many releases boiled down to me making changes to one file! Pushing a new version to test should have been a simple file copy.

Of course it couldn't be that simple. Numerous "tickets" had to be approved. Another branch of IT, that was even more stressed and suffered higher levels of turnover than ours, was dragged in to execute a single trivial file copy. In many cases more bytes were generated by all this pointless time-wasting ceremony than I had changed in that single file. Of course all this took time, and as hard as I looked for a *useless-time-wasting-bullshit* category in our web-based hours tracking system, I couldn't find one. There's a management mantra: you can only improve what you measure. Funny how companies never measure the bullshit.

In retrospect we should have junked The Stinking Tauntaun System or opted for a radical rewrite. It's ironic but something like this is what's going to happen. If I was young I would be bitter but I cashed in on this project. In my consulting days I was always on the lookout for Stinking Tauntauns: they were freaking gold mines for those of us that have acquired a taste for the bracing putrid fumes of rotting code.

Dark Energy Entities

Posted: 17 Apr 2015 03:44:02

I've been having fun on a new social media site called [Quora](#). Quora operates on the [StackOverflow](#) principle. People pose questions and others answer. The act of asking of sincere questions, [even silly ones](#), seems to take the wind out of troll sails. Political sites quickly degenerate into primate poo tossing contests. I enjoy pitching poo with the best of them but I demand wit, verve and humor with my insults. Sadly, these qualities are the first to go when vicious trolls tear into partisan believers of any persuasion. Honest political conversations have never been easy. I remember screeching, mostly left-wing, university harridans shouting down heretics forty years ago. I'm sure they would have burned them at the stake if the option had been available. Still there is something about the question that makes people put down their torches and give a heretic a break.

A good question and answer session is like a connect-the-dots cartoon. For example

Javed Qadrud-Din observed when responding to the question:

Hypothetically, if there is intelligent alien life, with the knowledge and means to traverse space and travel to Earth, what would be their reasons for not making contact?

That aliens might be billions of years ahead of us and

we would be unable to recognize the evidence of their existence, and such evidence would instead appear to us as aspects of the nature of reality itself.

I thought about this and responded:

Your observation that some alien intelligences could be billions of years ahead of us and may, “appear as part of nature,” made we wonder what might qualify as a manifestation of such beings. It goes without saying that super advanced beings with real immortal ambitions will be somewhat bummed with mere matter. If our, admittedly primitive physical theories hold up, it looks like in the very long run, e.g. 10^{100} or more years, all matter will decay and space will expand into an unimaginably vast void with a temperature indistinguishable from absolute zero. All matter and energy based sentience will be snuffed out: everything, absolutely everything dies. What’s left in such a universe? Only Dark Energy survives and prospers. Cosmologists have noted that we appear to live in a Dark Energy dominated universe and the domination started fairly recently, within the last two billion years or so. If intelligent life evolved somewhere in the cosmos six or seven billion years ago that would be plenty of time to advance to the point that such beings could insert themselves into the only durable part of our universe: space itself. So perhaps the accelerating expansion of space is the “part of nature” that gives away the presence of such highly evolved beings.

We may be living in a Dark Energy Entity *Cosmoscene*. It’s unlikely that beings able to alter the entire observable universe are going to make contact with pitiful little poo throwing naked apes.

What hobbies do you have? Have you learned anything useful from them?

Posted: 20 Apr 2015 19:55:35

This is my first “cross-posted” entry. I composed this on [Quora](#). I was asked to answer [the title question](#) and I did. I probably won’t do this very often. Still, a little experimenting is fun.

Answer by John Baker:

The short answer is *many* and *yes*. The longer answer is pretty much everything I do, *that matters to me*, is a hobby of some form or other. Some of my major hobbies are:

1. Amateur Astronomy
2. Photography
3. Blogging
4. Recreational Programming.

Amateur Astronomy has been a lifelong pursuit. I was hooked as a child looking at Venus’s crescent through a small refractor in the badlands of Utah. It’s hard to relate how much I have learned from Amateur Astronomy or how much it has influenced my life but it is a *lot* and *heavily*. My decision to study science in school and later university were outgrowths of this passion. I have traveled all over the world to view eclipses, see spectacular comets, and tour major observatories. Even today the best possible night for me is to stand alone under clear extremely dark high altitude skies and soak in the gentle light of the Milky Way.

Photography is also a lifelong hobby. I shot my first roll of film on a cheap fixed focus camera when I was eight. I blow hot and cold on my hobbies. Sometimes they utterly dominate my every waking hour. Other times they lie dormant, ignored, waiting for me to pick them up again. Photography is such a hobby. Over the decades it has taught me a lot of chemistry: I started picture taking in the “chemical” era. Nowadays I’ve absorbed a wide variety of photography related software skills. I’ve also learned a lot of history. Studying early photographers and how they created some of their iconic images is fascinating.

[Blogging](#) is relatively new hobby. I started with the idea that it would be good “composition practice,” a way to learn about web site maintenance, and finally a safe way to vent without serving time for assaulting imbeciles. It has met all these expectations and more. It’s presumptuous for bloggers to describe themselves as writers but you do acquire a greater understanding of what writers do. That old joke about being a drunk with a writing problem is not far from the mark.

As for recreational programming: despite going into work day after day, year after year, and staring at screens of, *please stab my eyes out*, “work code.” I still muster

the energy to work at home on software projects using unconventional programming languages and tools. Many professional peers have poked fun at my eccentric tastes and others have told me I was wasting my time. The joke has been on them. Many that cast these aspersions are no longer employed while my current job is a direct consequence of knowing things the convention bound do not.

I have learned many specific things from my hobbies but the single best thing I've learned is simple intellectual integrity. Nobody is going to do your hobby for you. Paying others to take up your hobbies makes no sense. Cheating on a hobby is crazy. You have to do the work by yourself; you have to learn by yourself; you have to think for yourself! Hobbies refine our individuality; I'd recommend more hobbies for everyone.

Mauna Kea Morons on the March

Posted: 28 Apr 2015 02:34:41



Thirty Meter Telescope

I couldn't resist venting on [The Register](#). The following is a slightly edited version of my *contribution to the conversation* bitches!

Trigger Warning: searing contempt for tools and fools!

You are making way too much sense. As a long-standing amateur astronomer and aficionado of major observatories I can state with absolute certainty that if you want to preserve the environment around a mountain one of the best ways to do it is to place a major observatory on it. Large telescopes require large dark zones. If people would turn their damn lights off at night development in dark zones might be permissible but as you are well aware people will not turn their fucking lights off and will look at you like you've just beamed down from starship Looney

Tunes if you try to tell them that [light pollution is a real thing](#). The only way to insure a dark environment is to restrict development and, as you point out, that limits how much money certain cretins can extract. What's happening on Mauna Kea happened before on Mount Graham in Arizona. So called environmentalists fought for decades to block the [Large Binocular Telescope](#) because it might stress some squirrels. Well the scope got built and the [squirrels are doing just fine](#) and will continue to thrive because their habitat will not be sodomized by condo developers and other invasive lower life forms.

Mixed in with all this phony eco-warrior nonsense is even more phony religious nonsense. I realize it is horribly judgmental and privileged white male of me to say that sky fairies of all types, even "protected class" aboriginal brown people sky fairies, are complete and utter rubbish! Jesus did not rise from the dead, Mohammed did not ascend to heaven, and Pele is not stomping around on Mauna Kea regardless of what native Hawaiians believe. If this offends you demonstrate why your sky fairy is any less imaginary than [The Flying Spaghetti Monster](#). "Belief" is a bullshit word. It will be a pathetic day if the construction of a major 21st century observatory is stopped to placate scientific illiterates and religious primitives.

An Honest Resume Personal Statement

Posted: 05 May 2015 02:59:11

While updating an online version of my resume a nagging web page advised me to include a personal statement: apparently the personal statement is my chance to stand out, make that all-important first impression, and firmly affix my lips to succulent corporate ass.

Being programmer oriented, the web page suggested I write about my first computer. This is just conniving HR speak for, "How old are you?" HR cannot directly ask so they'll probe circuitously. Sorry gals, (HR is a female ghetto), I'm on to you. I am excellent actor and liar. I can play your little game but I am no longer interested. Still your little page made we wonder what my personal statement would be like if I was telling the truth and not spinning like a millisecond pulsar. I think it would look something like this:

I want to solve problems: not create them. You would be surprised how many software organizations cannot tell the difference.

Ask yourself:

1. Does your organization think the orthodox application of trendy project management “methodologies”³⁹ like agile is a substitute for real insight and work?
2. Do you bind yourself in SOX inspired straitjackets and wonder why programmer morale and productivity has plummeted?
3. Do you have an antiquated remote work policy and insist staff show up for periodic management brow beatings and pointless brain numbing meetings?
4. Are you wedded to standard software tools merely because they are standard?
5. Are you afraid of iconoclastic viewpoints and meekly seek a lowest common denominator consensus?
6. Finally, do you follow industry trends or set them?

Perhaps my bad attitude shocks you.

“Who would hire this guy?” you ask.

It’s a fair question. I’ve had my fill of “Software Theater.” I will no longer act like I agree with bad ideas just to get along. From now on I am going to tell people what I really think, not what they yearn to hear.

To work with me your organization must be:

1. Located somewhere I want to live to or have an enlightened 21st century remote work policy.

I am tired of wasting my life in humdrum hellholes because that’s where an employer is located. This is inexcusable for 21st century software developers. If you haven’t figured out how to manage geographically dispersed remote workers your organization is hidebound, myopic and doomed!

2. Have a positive attitude about novel approaches to problems and encourage programmer autonomy.

³⁹I loathe the word “methodologies.” The correct word is “methods.” Wanton syllable inflation is a reliable bullshit tell.

I have often solved problems with nonstandard tools and techniques only to be told to do it again using a standard tool. Sometimes this makes sense but usually it's motivated by pure organizational fear.

"Oh my God we won't be able to find someone to support this!"

Or even worse, "We'll have to learn something new!"

Companies make a big show about "thinking outside the box" while huddling like bed wetting cowards in the corner of one.

3. Accept the simple fact that work is small part of life and stop trying to manage employees outside of the workplace.

It's amazing what some companies think they can get away with! Would you believe [asking recruits for Facebook and Twitter passwords?](#) Don't try this with me; I might punch you! Most companies know that asking for passwords crosses all sorts of inappropriate boundaries but even more enlightened organizations often have a "velvet fist" social media policy that basically tells employees not to involve the company in their personal jackassery. This is a reasonable request but it's usually seen as bullying. Most will shut up: not me! Freedom of speech is fundamental and absolute. Companies that try to silence employees should be ashamed of themselves.

If you're still reading and think, *I like the cut of this guy's jib. We have enough kowtowing eunuchs on payroll: a few ballsy shitheads may spruce this joint up.* I'd suggest you look over my attached resume, peruse my [public GitHub repositories](#), read my blog, browse my [extensive photos](#), and check out what I'm [reading](#). You'll get a pretty accurate sense of who I am, what turns my crank, how I approach problems, and how I deal with difficulties. Unspoken social conventions demand that we suppress ourselves to work. I will no longer do this. *I am what I am; I do what do; I will not change for you.*

Social Security Numbers are Broken beyond Repair

Posted: 17 May 2015 18:24:39

Imagine that you are buying a new set of wheels with cash. Being a cash transaction there is no need to negotiate loans or check credit; you have the money in your wallet. Usually vendors are delighted when handed a thick wad of bills but we are living in unusual, no depraved, times. Before the dealer takes your wad you will probably be asked for your Social Security Number. WTF you think! It's a cash transaction; why

must government stick its inept grasping tentacles in your business?

Of course if you are financing a set of wheels, applying for a mortgage, negotiating a rental, submitting a job application, or buying a fricking big screen TV, you will be asked, over and over again, for your Social Security Number. Why are so many tiresome busybodies obsessing over nine measly, easily forged, digits? Well cowboys and girls, the Social Security Number has morphed into a general purpose personal tracking identifier. Busybodies covet this number because once they have it they can:

1. Check your credit history.
2. See if you have ever been in prison.
3. Determine if you owe money.
4. Track your movements from one state or city to another.

And god knows what else!

When Social Security was setup in the 1930s paranoid right wingers darkly warned that Social Security Numbers (SSNs) would be used to track people and ultimately infringe their freedoms. Silly ancient right wingers: who really cares that they were completely right about SSNs? Only criminals, and evil people with things to hide, care about the widespread abuse of Social Security Numbers. *If you believe this moronic twaddle please leave your Social Security Number in a comment on this blog.* You can trust me! I would never abuse your number.

Now if you're a big government guy or gal you will loudly assert that it's perfectly acceptable for the government to maintain *some identifier* that links you to your Social Security account. On this I agree, some identifier is required, but Social Security Numbers are probably the worst possible way to do this. The ideal Social Security "Number" would:

1. Unambiguously link you to your Social Security Account.
2. Be impossible to counterfeit or fake.
3. Be useless for any other purpose.

The idiotic nine digit scheme used for Social Security Numbers completely fails all three of these tests.

Let's start with unambiguous linking. News flash: your Social Security Number [does not uniquely identify you](#). There are many reasons for SSN duplicates with identity theft being the leading cause. Is it fair to blame SSN numbers for criminal abuse? Yes you dumb fucks! Identity systems must operate on the bedrock principle that people are liars, cheats, and disgusting defecating naked apes. Always assume the

worst of your fellow apes; you will still be disappointed. Good identifier schemes make it impossible to generate duplicates regardless of how thoroughly evil or incompetent people are. Social Security Numbers naively assume we are good people. This is asking for it.

How hard is it to counterfeit or fake Social Security Numbers? It's so damn easy you can go to [this website](#) and push a button. While it's unlikely that nine random digits will form a valid SSN it's clearly not rocket science to concoct plausible SSNs. Good identifier keys are unavoidably unique. There are [many high quality unique key algorithms](#). SSNs are crappy keys; any database professional that advocated their use would be fired on the spot.

As for being useless for other purposes: here the failure is so complete, so total, and so absolute, that it's hard to attribute it to mere government stupidity. I don't blame the paranoid for thinking it was a clumsy backdoor scheme to label citizens for other purposes. Heh, even the official [government Social Security Page](#) brags that your SSN has "*come to be used as a nearly universal identifier.*" Anyone that contests this is an idiot. Every two-bit database out there has an SSN column in it. Many SSNs are still completely unencrypted; they're begging software professionals like me to get into the identity theft business. Keep that in mind the next time some outfit asks for your SSN.

When you make a VISA, MasterCard or Apple Pay purchase with a "[chipped card](#)" a onetime transaction code is generated and mixed with your credit card number.⁴⁰ This allows the central authority, VISA and MasterCard in this case, to verify your credit *without creating a permanent number that is forever tied to your name*. This scheme is vastly more secure than SSNs but falls short of high quality cryptographic key schemes used in systems like Bitcoin. The QR code on this blog is a Bitcoin address with money in it. Try and steal my Bitcoin bitches! The point is there are sound ways of creating account links that do not invite abuse and tracking. So why the hell are we still tolerating static, insecure, come and get it identity thieves, broken beyond repair, Social Security Numbers?

⁴⁰One of the consequences of chipping credit cards is that it is no longer necessary to display the number on the card. You only need the number to interact with non-chipped devices. Eventually people will figure this out and start asking for credit cards that do not display the number. I see a great advertising campaign in the future. "You can get our numberless smart card or their numbered dumb fuck card. What's it going to be?"

Copulation, Cooking and Cleaning

Posted: 13 Jun 2015 18:21:29

A refreshing [blogosphere](#) development is something called the “[manosphere](#).” The manosphere is a mangy collection of young male bloggers that have had it with man hating feminism. I’m an old boomer fart, not exactly the manosphere demographic, but I see their point. I remember when rational feminists⁴¹ set their sights on “equal pay for equal work.” I fully supported pay equity and, when you correct for [actual hours worked](#), that battle has been won in *oppressive western cultures*.⁴² But, as every married man knows, what women ask for is seldom what they really want.

Equity was never the goal of radical feminists! Radical feminists are nasty menstruating socialists. Their perfect world looks a lot like an old-fashioned [new-man](#) communist utopia: a utopia that was rudely rejected for all sorts of [Gulag’ey](#) reasons. Sadly, radical feminists don’t take rejection gracefully. Once a month their bitter frustrations manifest as malignant misandry. Yeah, “femnazis” are real and they’re everywhere! Femnazicism rears its ugly bull dyke head in repressive [campus speech codes](#), phony palimony suits, [bogus rape claims](#), “fat acceptance” campaigns, and tiresome PMS laced whining about how hard it is to find a *real* man. Well ladies, I am going to let you in on a little guy secret; *it’s much harder to find a real woman!*

What I am about to say will strike manospherians, and real men everywhere, as obvious but we can no longer count on men being men. There are a lot of misguided [white knights](#) and whipped [manginas](#) out there so grab your sanitary napkins and brace for reality.

In pre-pussy-boy days, men looked for, fought over, and highly valued “three C” women.

What the hell is a “three C” woman? A three C woman understands men. She has intuitively, or intellectually, grasped that human males are simple short-lived creatures that are biologically programmed to seek three things from woman: *copulation, cooking and cleaning* - the three Cs.

You can determine a man’s age by how he sorts his three Cs. When we’re young copulation is our absolute number one priority. Given a choice between copulation, cooking and cleaning we’ll always pick copulation. When we’re older, more settled, and our frantic need for copulation subsides, given a choice of fine cuisine or fine ass,

⁴¹Rational feminist was not oxymoronic when the movement started.

⁴²Not such much in [Clitoridectomy happy nonwestern societies](#).

we may choose the former. Finally, in our limp dotage, when Viagra no longer works, gently wiping the dribble off our chins, (cleaning), after a fine meal, (cooking), is greatly appreciated. Ladies if the three Cs are graciously on tap we'll happily put up with any amount of lady-shit. It sounds simple because it is!⁴³

Bang us, feed us, and cleanup afterwards, *without nagging resentment*, and we will love, cherish, protect, work, and die for you! And, here's the good news; you don't have to be a Victoria Secret maximum babe to pull this off. In purely economic terms any comely young woman who masters the three Cs is literally worth her weight in gold!⁴⁴ At current gold prices [one woman weight](#) is about \$2,300.000 US. Amortized over a fifty year marriage that works out to around \$45,000 per year. Guys, just try paying for hookers, gourmet takeout, and maid services for a measly \$45,000 a year. When you throw *love* into the deal the quality three C woman is the biggest bargain out there. So ladies, if you really want a *real* man, master your three Cs and you'll have your pick of them.

For Carl's Memorial

Posted: 20 Jun 2015 18:06:47

A memorial celebration for the life of Carl Sullivan was held today, June 20, 2015, in Calgary. I was unable to attend but I sent this little note. The world is a little gloomier without Carl.

1969 was a memorable year for many reasons but two “events” stand out for me. It was the year of Apollo 11, the epochal first moon landing. If humans still exist a thousand years from now the first moon landing will still be remembered and lauded. Of less historical, but greater personal interest, 1969 was also the year I met Carl B. Sullivan.

Apollo marked a high water mark for western civilization; we have been steadily degenerating ever since. Similarly, Carl, for me, marked a high *friendship* mark. No event of the last forty-six years holds a candle to Apollo 11 and no post Carl friend holds a candle to Carl.

⁴³Male maintenance requires some real work. Men expect to put in long hours looking after the women in their lives and they expect women to reciprocate. Unfortunately modern feminism labels such reciprocation “oppression.”

⁴⁴I am assuming a normal female weight of less than sixty-five kilograms. *Obese land fe-whales* are not worth their weight in gold.



Carl in his basement apartment surrounded by his drawings and hugging Puff: one of his long-lived cats. Carl was a good friend for most of my adult life. During the many years I lived in Edmonton I spent a lot of time with Carl. It's rather odd that I have so few pictures of him. I have been an avid amateur photographer since I was eight but I only have half-a-dozen pictures of Carl. I held off "developing" this image because of the reflection in Puff's eyes. Now I see this informal imperfection as a reflection, (pun intended), of Carl's haphazard fun-filled way of life.

I know Carl would enjoy being bonded with Apollo 11. He enjoyed the "weird." His own weird, the weird of others, the world's weird. Carl liked to cast himself as a sage and wizard. He was certainly a sage of the absurd and a wizard of fun.

I have many fond memories of visiting Carl after another exquisitely self-crafted dismaying day only to have Carl wave his wizard's wand and make my gloom bloom. This is an exceedingly rare talent and frankly we were blessed to fall under his spell.

I know Carl was ambivalent about the prospects of an afterlife. His appetite for the absurd did not extend to religion. I am harsher; I expect utter oblivion, but if I am wrong and find myself cast into Hell for a lifetime of misdemeanors, I'll find Carl, (he had his own Hell worthy misdemeanors), and Carl being Carl, will turn Hell into an eternal party!

Goodbye old friend you will never know how much we all miss you.

Turning JOD Dump Script Tricks

Posted: 04 Jul 2015 20:32:40

Have you ever wondered how extremely prolific bloggers do it? How is it possible to crank out thousands of blog entries per year without creating a giant stinking pile of mediocre doo-doo? Like most deep medium mysteries it's not very deep and there are

no mysteries. The spewers, people who post like teenage girls tweet, use two basic strategies:

1. **Multiple authors:** *The heroic image of the lone blogger waging holy war against a sea of Internet idiocy is largely a myth. Many popular prolific blogs are the work of many hands. The editor at [Analyze the Data not the Drivel](#) eschews this tactic. Apparently he's an incontinent and argumentative prima donna that sane people steer clear of.*
2. **Content recycling:** *In elementary school this was called copying. Now that we're all grown up we use terms like, "excerpting", "abstracting", and my favorite "re-purposing." The basic idea is simple. Take something you've written elsewhere and repackage it as something new. Hey, all the cool kids are doing it!*

The following is a slightly edited new appendix I have just added to the JOD manual. I am working to properly publish the [JOD manual](#) mostly so I can say that I've written a legitimate, albeit strange and queer, book.

I created this post by running the L^AT_EX code of the manual appendix through the excellent utility [pandoc](#), tweaking the resulting [markdown](#), and then using pandoc again to generate html for this blog. pandoc is a great "re-purposing" tool!

Finally, re-purposing is not entirely cynical. The act of moving material from one medium to another exposes problems. I found a few editing errors while creating this post that eluded my L^AT_EX eyes. If you find more this is your chance to tell me what a moron I am.

Dump script generation is my favorite JOD feature. Dump scripts serialize JOD dictionaries; they are mainly used to back up dictionaries and interact with version control systems. However, dump scripts are general J scripts and can do much more! Maintaining a stable of healthy JOD dictionaries is easier if you can turn a few dump script tricks.⁴⁵

1. **Flattening reference paths:** Open JOD dictionaries define a *reference path*. For example, if you open the following dictionaries:

⁴⁵Spicing up one's rhetoric with a double entendre like "turning tricks" may be construed as a *microaggression*. The point of colored language is to memorably make a point. You are unlikely to forget *turning dump script tricks*.

```

NB. open four dictionaries
od ::'smugdev smug image utils'
+-----+
!1!opened (ro/ro/ro/ro) ->smugdev!smug!image!utils!
+-----+

```

the reference path is `/smugdev/smug/image/utils`.

When objects are retrieved each dictionary on the path is searched in reference path order. If there are *no compelling reasons* to maintain separate dictionaries you can improve JOD retrieval performance and simplify dictionary maintenance by flattening all or part of the path.

To flatten the reference path do:

```

NB. reopen the first three dictionaries on the path
od ::'smugdev smug image' [ 3 od ''
+-----+
!1!opened (ro/ro/ro) ->!smugdev!smug!image!
+-----+

NB. dump to a temporary file (df)
df=: {:: showpass make jpath '~jodtemp/smugflat.ijl'
+-----+
!1!object(s) on path dumped ->c:/jodtemp/smugflat.ijl!
+-----+

NB. create a new flat dictionary
newd 'smugflat';jpath '~jodtemp/smugflat' [ 3 od ''
+-----+
!1!dictionary created ->!smugflat!c:/jodtemp/smugflat/!
+-----+

NB. open the flat dictionary and (utils)
od ::'smugflat utils'
+-----+
!1!opened (rw/ro) ->!smugflat!utils!
+-----+

NB. reload dump script ... output not shown ...
0!:0 df

```

The collapsed path `/smugflat/utils` will return the same objects as the longer path. It is important to understand that the collapsed dictionary `smugflat` does

not necessarily contain the same objects found in the three original dictionaries `smugdev`, `smug` and `image`. If objects with the same name exist in the original dictionaries only the first one found will be in the collapsed dictionary.

2. **Merging dictionaries:** If two dictionaries *contain no overlapping objects* it might make sense to merge them. This is easily achieved with dump scripts. To merge two or more dictionaries do:

```

NB. open and dump first dictionary
od 'dict0' [ 3 od ''
+-----+
!1!opened (rw) ->!dict0!
+-----+
df0=: {: showpass make jpath '~jodtemp/dict0.ijs'
+-----+
!1!object(s) on path dumped ->!c:/jodtemp/dict0.ijs!
+-----+


NB. open and dump second dictionary
od 'dict1' [ 3 od ''
+-----+
!1!opened (rw) ->!dict1!
+-----+
df1=: {: showpass make jpath '~jodtemp/dict1.ijs'
+-----+
!1!object(s) on path dumped ->!c:/jodtemp/dict1.ijs!
+-----+


NB. create new merge dictionary
newd 'mergedict';jpath '~jodtemp/mergedict' [ 3 od ''
+-----+
!1!dictionary created ->!mergedict!c:/jodtemp/mergedict/!
+-----+


NB. open merge dictionary and run dump scripts
od 'mergedict'
+-----+
!1!opened (rw) ->!mergedict!
+-----+


NB. reload dump scripts ... output not shown ...
0!:0 df0
0!:0 df1

```

Be careful when merging dictionaries. If there are common objects the last

object loaded is the one retained in the merged dictionary.

3. **Updating master file parameters:** When a new parameter is added to `jodparms.ijs` it will not be available in existing dictionaries. With dump scripts you can rebuild existing dictionaries and update parameters. To rebuild a dictionary with new or custom parameters do:

```
NB. save current dictionary registrations
(toHOST ; 1 { 5 od '') write_ajod_ jpath '~temp/jodregister.ijs'

NB. open dictionary requiring parameter update
od 'dict0' [ 3 od ''
+-----+
!1!opened (rw) ->!dict0!
+-----+

NB. dump dictionary and close
df=: {: showpass make jpath '~jodtemp/dict0.ijs'
+-----+
!1!object(s) on path dumped ->!c:/jodtemp/dict0.ijs!
+-----+
3 od ''
+-----+
!1!closed ->!dict0!
+-----+

NB. erase master file and JOD object id file
ferase jpath '~addons/general/jod/jmaster.ijf'
1
ferase jpath '~addons/general/jod/jod.ijn'
1

NB. recycle JOD - this recreates (jmaster.ijf) and (jod.ijn)
NB. using the new dictionary parameters defined in (jodparms.ijs)
(jodon , jodoff) 1
1 1

NB. re-register dictionaries
load jpath '~temp/jodregister.ijs'

NB. create a new dictionary - it will have the new parameters
newd 'dict0new';jpath '~jodtemp/dict0new' [ 3 od ''
+-----+
!1!dictionary created ->!dict0new!c:/jodtemp/dict0new!/
```

```

+-----+
od 'dict0new'
+-----+
!1!opened (rw) ->!dict0new!
+-----+
NB. reload dump script ... output not shown ...
0!:0 df

```

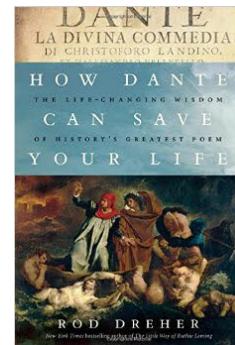
Before executing complex dump script procedures *back up your JOD dictionary folders* and play with dump scripts on test dictionaries. Dump scripts are essential JOD dictionary maintenance tools but like most powerful tools they must be used with care.

How Dante Can Save Your Life: Review

Posted: 12 Jul 2015 19:35:46

Dante's *Commedia* may save your life but I wouldn't bet on this book doing the same. How *Dante can Save Your Life* is both interesting, annoying, and ultimately disappointing. If I had stopped in the middle of this book I would have rated it higher. It certainly started out well but, what can only be described as the author's whining, slowly degraded my view.

The seriously religious do not perceive reliable approximations of reality. They are drifting with their phantoms, looking for things that cannot be rationally demonstrated to exist. Though I admire the discipline and restraint many intelligent religious people exhibit it's simply impossible to take their cherished beliefs seriously. Those of us that *demand* verifiable reasons for accepting propositions will never accede to the belief that the purpose of life is to return to God. The author repeatedly returns to this theme as he reads Dante and shares his own life.



The author, Rod Dreher, and his family endured serious grief. The best part of this book is his retelling of his sister's death from cancer in her forties and her community's outpouring of love and support. I don't think the author would disagree that his sister's death, and the [book he wrote about it](#), greatly contributed to his career as a writer.

It was at this point the author had a crisis that lead to Dante. Cemeteries are for the living not the dead, *as is myth*. Dante created an extravagant and great myth and like all great classics his epic poem has much to offer readers in any age. The author uses it as a type of self-help book to work through his family problems.

His problems are common. Many of us have seen loved family members die horribly, many of us have suffered crippling injuries, many of have distressing careers, and many of us have family members that are struggling with themselves and us. Yet some of us are tough enough to see life as a random clash of blameless atoms and that whining will not fix anything.

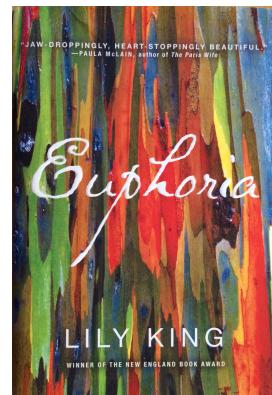
In Dante's view this is the great sin of pride that unchecked leads to Hell. Lucky for us Hell and Heaven are myths. Art, however great, is not reality.

Euphoria: Review

Posted: 18 Jul 2015 16:47:38

Lily King's excellent new novel *Euphoria* derives from an incident in Margaret Mead's life. Margaret Mead achieved fame as a young woman with her 1928 book *Coming of Age in Samoa*. Usually scholarly works do not attract mass audiences but the *good bits* of Mead's book read like soft-core porn and introduced the radical idea that sexual behavior in adolescence may have strong cultural overtones. Nowadays we lump such deep revelations in the "No Shit Sherlock" category!

Some of this is brilliantly alluded to in *Euphoria*. The strong female character (Nell) had written a popular book that her husband (Fen) envied and peers deprecated. The three main characters, Nell, Fen and Bankson, are social anthropologists doing field research in New Guinea in the 1930s. All three have serious doubts about what they are doing. They obliquely acknowledge the sheer conceit of foreign neophytes descending on an unfamiliar culture and, without speaking the language, being familiar with the environment, or knowing *jack shit* about the local economy, "decode a people," in a few short months.



Early social anthropologists liked to cast themselves as "anti-missionaries." *Euphoria* echoes this sentiment in a few passages. Anthropologists were there to learn about a culture not obliterate it with Christian sky fairy fantasies. The admirable agnosticism

of social anthropologists, you cannot take one myth seriously when you have studied hundreds, is still blunted by an infantile dedication to the absolute primacy of culture. We are not animals but Rousseauian “blank sheets” that our culture scribbles on. Many contemporary social scientists of the left, “Are there any other kind?” bitterly dismiss criticism of this ludicrous axiom as “White Privilege.” The social anthropologists of Mead’s day may have been a bit delusional and naive but they didn’t create utter bullshit like [Critical Race Theory](#) or, I kid you freaking not, [Microaggression Theory](#).

My only complaint about *Euphoria* is that it romanticizes a “soft pseudo-science.” Anthropology has two major branches: physical and social. Physical anthropology deals with things like comparative anatomy, radioisotope dating, geological layering, and DNA; it is very much a *real* science! Social anthropology is all squishy, personal, and non-verifiable; it is not a real science. It’s not even, to use Rutherford’s exquisite burn, “stamp collecting.” *Euphoria* makes this all clear to scientifically literate readers. In many ways *Euphoria* is a better introduction to Mead than Mead herself: recommended.

American Star Chamber creates Foreign Passport Business Opportunity

Posted: 24 Jul 2015 03:28:49

Good news citizens: the putrid rogue intellects in Washington D.C. have created a brand new shiny [Star Chamber](#). What’s a Star Chamber you ask? It’s basically a secret kangaroo court. The US system of *injustice* already employs an alphabet soup of Star Chambers. Perhaps you’ve heard of [FISA](#) and its outstanding work of rubber stamping the surveillance of dangerous American citizens – oops terrorists. Well, I’m happy to report, that the self-aggrandizing assholes that drool us are no longer content with [monitoring our terrorist naughty bits](#); now they’re going for what they covet most: our money.

The new Star Chamber law plugs an egregious hole that citizens – oops terrorists – have mercilessly exploited in the past. You see, when an American – oops terrorist – determines that residing in the US and maintaining American citizenship is no longer worth it, said American could simply gather up his holdings, leave the country, and renounce his citizenship. Remember [Eduardo Saverin](#)? He was a cofounder of Facebook who did a little arithmetic and figured out that dumping his US citizenship would save him many millions of tax dollars. Eduardo did what any intelligent human being would do. He analyzed the cost-benefit ratio of his citizenship and made the

correct financial decision.

Of course the entire financial position of the US government is predicated on making sure that citizens do not get in the habit of making such cost-benefit analyzes. In the past the old tropes of patriotism, honor, giving back, national pride, and so forth kept many of us from firing up our computers but that's the past. This is the age of hope and change. And many little Eduardo's hope to get out of here with some of their change!

The years of hope and change have led to ever [increasing number of Americans fleeing the country](#). It's only a trickle now but wait until [Pussydent Hildabeast](#) takes over. The trickle will turn into a flood and that's a problem because without taxpayers how will Pussydent Hildabeast pay off her cronies, reward her allies, and punish her enemies? It takes a lot of money to bribe – oops run – government.

Fortunately, the new Star Chamber fixes the exile problem. Under the new regime, if the *government thinks you owe them back taxes*⁴⁶ they can refuse to issue you a passport. You're a flight risk you ungrateful terrorist – oops citizen – scum. It gets better! If the government thinks you're aiding foreign terrorists they can also refuse to issue you a passport. Of course, what constitutes "aiding foreign terrorists" is completely unspecified. Better not send any *attaboy* ISIS tweets, they might be construed as "aiding foreign terrorists." And, because we are so hope and changey these days, if you dare ask why the government thinks you are aiding terrorists this shiny new law allows them to withhold evidence because: terrorists! Due process is so white privilege! With such an idiotic and oppressive law in place, it's just a matter of time before the US harbors thousands of internal tax and terrorist aiding exiles. They'll be joining a larger cohort of hundreds of thousands of [former American drug offense prisoners](#) that are also, oddly enough, frequently denied US passports.

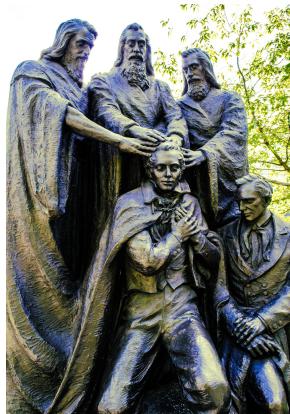
This is all good news! What the morons in Washington have created is a gigantic business opportunity for any country that will issue Americans passports for cash. If you don't already have another passport contrive to get one as soon as possible! You really don't want to be imprisoned here if you run afoul of our increasing fascist authorities.

Milliblog:⁴⁷ Religious and Comic Origin Stories

Posted: 06 Sep 2015 19:07:22

⁴⁶Of course the IRS never incorrectly assesses a citizen's – oops terrorist's – taxes.

⁴⁷A *milliblog* is a short blog entry that makes a single point and then gets out of the reader's face.



Joseph Smith
gets his superpowers.

Have you ever noticed that the “origin stories” of religious figures and comic superheroes have a lot in common? Green Lantern is given a powerful ring. Moses is handed magic tablets. Buddha, a wealthy patrician, is horrified by injustice and suffering and decides to fix things: ditto for Batman. A powerful, otherworldly being, comes to Earth to save us. Are we talking about Christ or Superman? The only difference between comic book heroes and religious figures is: comic book origin stories are more plausible. There is a teeny tiny chance that being bitten by a radioactive spider will give you some powers, probably a tolerance for certain arachnid proteins, but there is absolutely no chance that long dead John the Baptist will poof back from the dead to baptize your semi-literate backwoods ass.

What is Required: Print Captions on the back of Photographs

Posted: 07 Sep 2015 20:14:52



I am tired of waiting for “the market” to exploit painfully obvious opportunities so I will now provide guidance, in the form of *milliblog* entries, that tell our less imaginative entrepreneurs just what some of us would buy if we could.

Here’s a deep request. *How about printing captions on the back of photographs?*

I just went through the excruciating ordeal of ordering about one hundred prints from [SmugMug](#). SmugMug prints meet my high standards but their online ordering software is clunky and clearly geared toward very small print runs. If you have hundreds of pictures, of varying and custom sizes, the software will punish you. The obvious steps of setting a paper type, selecting all your images, and then letting the software work out the paper size from image aspect ratio is not available. You must go image by image setting one easily derived parameter after another. I would print a lot more if it wasn’t such a frigging chore.

As annoying as SmugMug print-ordering is at least I get the prints I want with one major exception. If you check out [my online photographs](#) you’ll see I use captions like *nanoblog* entries. Many people have told me they really like my captions. One of my pet peeves is unlabeled photographs. I have wonderful hundred-year-old photographs of elegantly posed complete strangers because *nobody left a clue on the back*.

So, in addition to printing timestamps and file names on the back of photographs, include captions as well!

P.S. It takes about five years for the market to meet my obvious requirements; don’t hold your breath.

2016

SWAG a J/EXCEL/GIT Personal Cash Flow Forecasting Mob

Posted: 10 Jan 2016 23:14:39

While browsing in a favorite bookstore with my son, I spotted a display of horoscope themed Christmas tree ornaments. The ornaments were glass balls embossed with golden birth signs like Aquarius, Gemini, Cancer, et cetera, and a descriptive phrase that “summed up” the character of people born under a sign. Below my birth sign golden text declared, “Imaginative and Suspicious.”

I said to my son, “I hate it when astrological rubbish is right.”

I am imaginative and suspicious; it’s a curse. When it comes to money my “suspicious dial” is permanently [set on eleven](#). I assume everyone is out to cheat and defraud me until there is overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Paranoia is generally crippling but when it comes to cold hard cash it’s a sound retention strategy.

Prompted by an eminent life move, I found myself in need of a cash flow forecasting tool. Normal people deal with forecasting problems by buying standard finance programs or cranking up spreadsheets; imaginative and suspicious people roll their own.

SWAG

SWAG, (Silly Wild Ass Guess), is a hybrid J/EXCEL/GIT mob⁴⁸ that meets my eccentric needs. I wanted a tool that:

1. Abstracted away [accounting noise](#).
2. Was general and flexible.
3. Used highly portable, durable, and version control friendly inputs and outputs.
4. Reflected what ordinary people, not tax accountants, actually do with money.
5. Is open source and unencumbered by parasitic software patents.

⁴⁸What do you call *dis-integrated* collections of programs that you use to solve problems? Declaring such dog piles “systems” demeans the word “system” and gives the impression that everything has been planned. This is not how I roll. “Mob” is far more appropriate. It conveys a proper sense of disorder and danger.

Amazingly, my short list of no-brainer requirements eliminates most standard finance programs. Time to code!

SWAG Inputs

The bulk of SWAG is a JOD generated self-contained J script. You can [peruse the script here](#). SWAG inputs and outputs are brain-dead simple TAB delimited text tables. Inputs consist of monthly, null-free, numeric time series tables, scenario tables, and name cross reference tables. Outputs are simple, null-free, numeric time series tables. Input and output time series tables have identical formats.

A few examples will make this clear. Table 1 on page 294 is a typical SWAG input and output time series table.

The first header line is a simple list of names. The first name “Date” heads a column of first of month dates in YYYY-MM-DD format. The SWAG clock has month resolution and dates are the only nonnumeric items. Names beginning with “E” like E0, E1, ..., are aggregated expenses. Names beginning with “I” like I0, I1, I2 ... are income totals. “R” names are reserves: basically savings, investments, equity and so forth. “D” names are various debts. BB is basic period balance, NW is period net worth and “U” names are utility series. Utility series facilitate calculations. Remaining names are self-explanatory totals. Be aware that this table has been formatted for this blog. Examples of raw input and output tables [can be found here](#).

The next ingredient in the SWAG stew is what many call a scenario. A scenario is a collection of prospective assumptions and actions. In one scenario you buy a Mercedes and assume interest rates remain low. In another, you take the bus and rates explode. When forecasting I evaluate five basic scenarios, grim, pessimistic, expected, optimistic, and exuberant. Being a negative [Debbie Downer](#) type I rarely invest time in exuberant scenarios. I concentrate on grim and pessimistic scenarios because once you are mentally prepared for the worst anything better feels like a lottery win.

Table 2 on page 295 is a typical SWAG scenario table. Scenario tables, like time series tables, are simple TAB delimited text files.

Again the first header row is a simple list of names. Most scenario names are self-explanatory but four `OnDate`, `OffDate`, `Method`, and `MethodArguments` merit some explanation. SWAG series methods `assume`, `history`, `reserve`, `transfer`, `borrow`, and `spend` are modeled on what people typically do with cash.

Date	E0	...	Etotal	I0	...	Itotal	R0	...	Rtotal	D0	...	Dtotal	BB	NW	U0	...
2015-10-01	912.00	...	2718.88	4806.00	...	4806.00	130054.17	...	155116.67	0	...	2087.13	159291.79	0	0	...
2015-11-01	912.00	...	2725.78	4812.01	...	4812.01	130054.17	...	155116.67	0	...	2086.23	161378.02	0	0	...
2015-12-01	912.00	...	2732.71	4818.02	...	4818.02	130054.17	...	155116.67	0	...	2085.31	163463.33	0	0	...
2016-01-01	912.00	...	2739.67	4824.05	...	4824.05	130054.17	...	155116.67	0	...	2084.37	165547.70	0	0	...
2016-02-01	912.00	...	2746.66	4830.08	...	4830.08	130054.17	...	155116.67	0	...	2083.41	167631.12	0	0	...
2016-03-01	912.00	...	2753.68	4836.11	...	4836.11	130054.17	...	155116.67	0	...	2082.43	169713.55	0	0	...
...
...

Table 1: A typical SWAG input and output TAB delimited table. This table has been formatted to fit on a single page. Many columns have been elided. Ellisions are indicated with ... ellipsis.

Raw input files can be inspected at <https://github.com/bakerid99/jacks/tree/master/swag/tabsheets>

Name	Scenario	...	Value	OnDate	OffDate	Method	Method.Arguments	Description
reservetotal	s0	...	0	2015-09-01	2015-10-01	assume	RSavings=-0.5 [RInvest=-.3 [ROther=.1	annual nominal percent reserve growth or decline during period annualized car maintenance until first death
car	s0	...	50	2015-09-01	2035-08-01	history	BackPeriods=.1	current rent until move
house	s0	...	912	2015-09-01	2016-08-01	history	BackPeriods=.1	car insurance
insurance	s0	...	100	2015-09-01	2035-08-01	history	YearInflate=.5	normal monthly living expenses
living	s0	...	1650	2015-09-01	2044-01-01	history	BackPeriods=.4 [YearInflate=-.1.5	maintain net monthly income until move
salary	s0	...	4800	2015-09-01	2016-08-01	history	Initial=.1 [RInvest=-.1	stock value at model start
reservetotal	s0	...	25000	2015-09-01	2015-10-01	reserve	Initial=.1 [RInvest=-.1	savings at model start
reservetotal	s0	...	130000	2015-09-01	2015-10-01	reserve	Initial=.1 [RInvest=-.1	reduced net income after move until retirement
salary	s0	...	4200	2016-08-01	2023-07-01	history	BackPeriods=.4 [YearInflate=-.1.5	moving expenses
house	s0	...	2000	2016-08-01	2016-09-01	history	Initial=.1 [RInvest=-.1	incidental housing expenses after move
house	s0	...	100	2016-08-01	2044-01-01	history	Initial=.1 [RInvest=-.1	home owners association payments
house	s0	...	100	2016-08-01	2044-01-01	history	Initial=.1 [RInvest=-.1	property taxes
reservetotal	s0	...	150	2016-08-01	2044-01-01	history	Initial=.1 [RInvest=-.1	down payment added to house equity initial setting prevents double spend
house	s0	...	110000	2016-08-01	2016-09-01	reserve	Initial=.1 [RInvest=-.1	30 year mortgage rate on house until inheritance
loan	s0	...	150000	2016-08-01	2023-02-01	borrow	Interest=.4.5 [YearTerm=.30 [DHouse=-.1	down payment on house from savings
reservetotal	s0	...	110000	2016-08-01	2016-09-01	spend	Initial=.1 [RInvest=-.1	monthly retirement and other annuity payments end date is unknown
annuities	s0	...	250	2018-07-01	2035-08-01	history	Initial=.1 [RInvest=-.5.0 [REquity=-.5.0	any government pension payments
annuities	s0	...	50	2018-07-01	2035-08-01	history	Initial=.1 [RInvest=-.5.0 [REquity=-.5.0	market tanks government introduces negative interest
reservetotal	s0	...	0	2020-01-01	2044-01-01	assume	RSavings=-2.5 [RInvest=-.5.0 [REquity=-.5.0	pay balance of car at 5 percent for 5 years
loan	s0	...	10000	2020-07-01	2025-07-01	borrow	Interest=.5 [YearTerm=.5 [DCar=-.1	car down payment from savings
reservetotal	s0	...	7000	2020-07-01	2020-08-01	spend	Initial=.1 [RInvest=-.5.0 [REquity=-.5.0	inheritance to savings
reservetotal	s0	...	180000	2023-01-01	2023-02-01	reserve	Fee=.1500 [DHouse=-.1	pay off remaining mortgage balance after inheritance fee is closing cost
reservetotal	s0	...	150000	2023-03-01	2023-04-01	transfer	Initial=.1 [RInvest=-.5.0 [REquity=-.5.0	estimated social security payments spread over expected life
salary	s0	...	1400	2023-07-01	2035-08-01	history	Initial=.1 [RInvest=-.5.0 [REquity=-.5.0	medical insurance in the gap between retirement and spouse Medicare eligibility
insurance	s0	...	700	2023-07-01	2024-12-01	history	Initial=.1 [RInvest=-.5.0 [REquity=-.5.0	any retirement pension payments to spouse
annuities	s0	...	100	2024-12-01	2044-01-01	history	Initial=.1 [RInvest=-.5.0 [REquity=-.5.0	any us social security survivor benefit after first death

Table 2: A SWAG scenario table. This table has been formatted to fit on a single page. Some columns have been elided. Ellisions are indicated with ... ellipsis.

Raw scenario files can be inspected at <https://github.com/bakerjd99/jacks/tree/master/swag/scenarios>

1. `assume` sets expected interest rates and other global assumptions for a given time period. SWAG series methods operate over a well-defined time period. The period is defined by `OnDate` and `OffDate`.
2. `history` looks at past periods and estimates a numeric value that is projected into the future. Currently, history computes simple means but the underlying code can employ arbitrary time series verbs.
3. `reserve` manages savings, investments, equity and other cash-like instruments.
4. `borrow` borrows money and sets future loan payments. `borrow` supports simple amortization loans but is also capable of reading an arbitrary payment schedule that can be used for *exotic*⁴⁹ loans.
5. `transfer` moves money between reserves, debts, expenses and income series.
6. `spend` does just what you expect.

SWAG series methods adjust all the series impacted by the method. As you might expect the arguments of SWAG methods can be detailed. `MethodArguments` uses a restricted J syntax to set SWAG arguments. Argument order does not matter but only supported names are allowed. Many examples of SWAG `MethodArguments` can be found in the [EXCEL spreadsheet tp.xlsx](#). I use EXCEL as a scenario editor. By setting EXCEL filters, you can manage a large number of scenarios.

The final SWAG input is a name cross reference table. It is another TAB delimited text file that defines SWAG names. You can inspect a typical [cross-reference table here](#).

Running SWAG

To run SWAG you:

1. Prepare input files.
2. Start J, any front-end `jconsole`, `JQT` or `JHS` will do, and load the Swag script.
3. Execute `RunTheNumbers`.
4. Open the EXCEL spreadsheet `swag.xlsx`, click on the data ribbon and then press the “Refresh All” button.

⁴⁹When borrowing money you should always plan on paying it all back. Insist on a complete iron clad repayment schedule. If such a schedule cannot be provided run like hell or prepare for the thick end of a baseball bat to be rammed up your financial ass.

Let's work through the steps.

Prepare Input Files

By far the most difficult step is the first. Here you review your financial status which means checking bank balances, stock values, loan balances and so on. Depending on your holdings this could take anywhere from minutes to hours. I call this updating actuals. Not only is updating actuals the most difficult and time-consuming step it is also the most valuable. Money that is not closely watched leaks away.

I store my actuals in a simple tabbed spreadsheet. Each tab maintains an image of a text file. I enter my data and then cut and paste the sheets into a text editor where I apply final tweaks and then save the sheets as TAB delimited files.

Monthly income, expenses and debts are easy to update but some of my holdings do not provide monthly statements. The verb `RawReservesFromLast` in `Swag.ijs` fills in missing months with the last known values. When I'm finished preparing input files I'm left with four TAB delimited files, `RawIncome.txt`, `RawExpenses.txt`, `RawReserves.txt`, and `RawDebts.txt`. You can inspect [example actual files here](#).

Start J and load the Swag script.

The SWAG script is relatively self-contained. It can be run in any J session that loads the standard J profile. Load Swag with the standard load utility.

```
load 'c:/pd/fd/swag/swag.ijs'
```

Here SWAG is loaded in JHS.

Execute RunTheNumbers

`RunTheNumbers` sets the SWAG configuration, loads scenarios, copies actuals to each scenario, and then evaluates each scenario. Scenarios are numbered. I use positive numbers for “production” scenarios and negative numbers for test scenarios. It sounds more complicated than it is. This is all you have to do to execute `RunTheNumbers`

```
RunTheNumbers 0 1 2 3 4
```

The code is simple and shows what's going on.

```

J Http Server

load 'c:/pd/fd/swag/scripts/swag.ijs'
NB. interface word(s):
NB. FutureScenarios      NB. compute scenarios (y) as if all dates in future
NB. LoadConfig            NB. loads shared configuration sheets
NB. LoadSheets            NB. loads TAB delimited scenario actuals and forecast sheets
NB. RawReservesFromLast   NB. raw reserves sheet from last reserves file
NB. RunTest                NB. run test scenario
NB. RunTheNumbers          NB. compute all scenarios on list (y)
NB. Swag                  NB. compute Silly Wild Ass Guess forecast TAB delimited sheets
NB. SwagTest               NB. generates simulated scenario test sheets

```

```

RunTheNumbers=:3 : 0

NB.*RunTheNumbers v-- compute all scenarios on list (y).
NB.
NB. monad: blclFiles =. RunTheNumbers ilScenarios
NB.
NB.   RunTheNumbers 0 1 2 3 4

NB. parameters sheet is the last config sheet
ModelConfiguration_Swag_=:MainConfiguration_Swag_
parms=. ".;{:LoadConfig 0
scfx=. ScenarioPrefix

ac=. toHOST fmttd ActualSheet 0
ac write TABSheetPath,'MainActuals',SheetExt

sf=. 0$:
for_sn. y do.
  ac write TABSheetPath,scfx,(":sn),'Actuals',SheetExt
  sf=. sf , parms Swag sn [ LoadSheets sn
end.

sf
)

```

`RunTheNumbers` writes a pair of TAB delimited forecast and statistics files for each

scenario it evaluates.

Open swag.xlsx and press “Refresh All”

The [spreadsheet swag.xlsx](#) loads SWAG TAB delimited text files and plots results.⁵⁰ I plot monthly cash flow, estimated net worth and debt/equity for each scenario. Figure 124 on page 299 is a typical cash flow plot. It estimates mean monthly cash balance over the scenario time range. Figure 125 on page 300 is typical net worth plot. It estimates mean net worth over time.

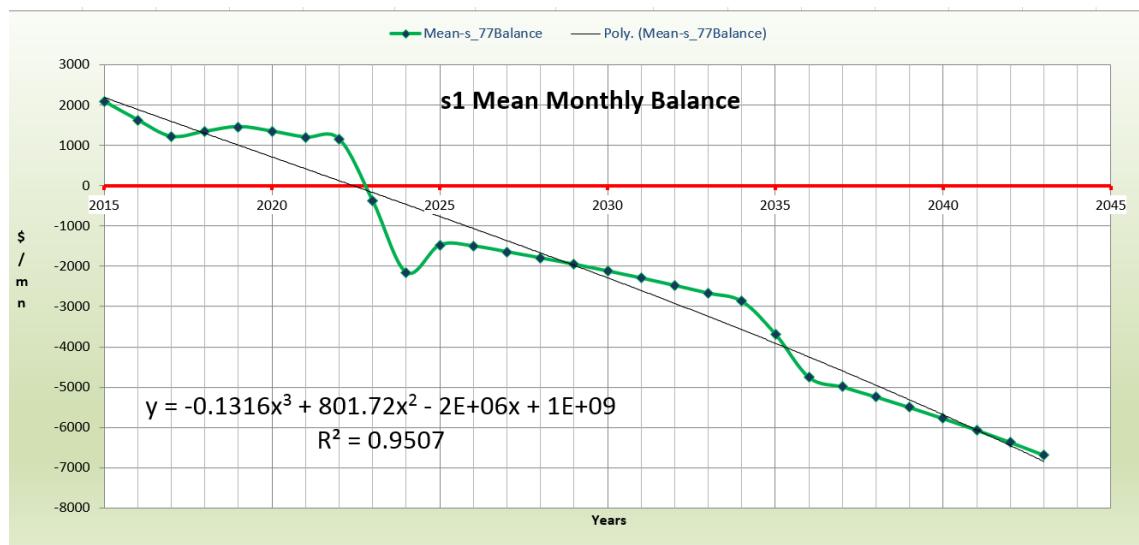


Figure 124: Mean monthly cash flow balance over time. The polynomial displayed on the graph is an estimated trend line. R^2 is a standard fit measure.

So far SWAG has met my basic needs and forced me to pay more attention to the proverbial bottom line. As I use the system I will fix bugs, refine rough spots, and add *strictly necessary* features. Feel free to use or adapt SWAG for your own purposes. If you do leave a note on this blog or follow the [SWAG repository on GitHub](#).

⁵⁰It may be necessary to adjust file paths on the EXCEL DATA ribbon to load SWAG TAB delimited text files.

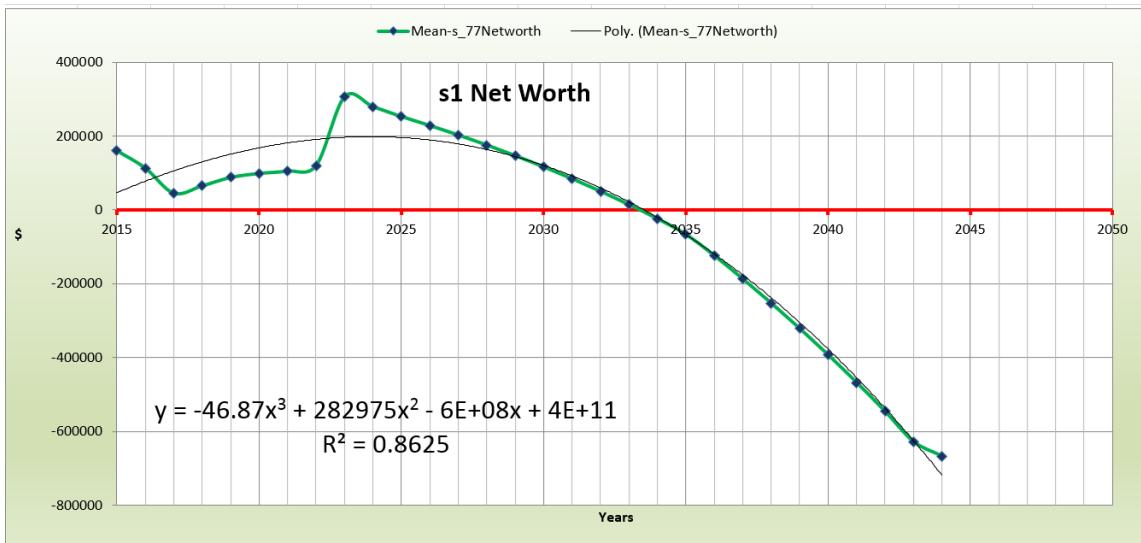


Figure 125: Mean net worth. In this happy scenario we die broke and leave a giant bill for the government. *They can meet me in Hell to collect.*

On Shiny Pony and Witch Berning

Posted: 12 Mar 2016 21:24:48

This week Canada's shiny new Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is hanging out with Obama. You can imagine my excitement: two photogenic lightweights sharing a heartwarming *bromance* on the public's dime. I am at a loss to imagine a more hurl inducing scenario. I shared my feelings with a terse CBC comment.

As a dual US-Canadian citizen I must avert my eyes when confronted with such unctuous and expensive dog and pony shows. At least, we know who the dog is and who the shiny pony is! In a few short months, the toilet of history will flush on the Obama administration. For this we can thank term limits: one the best ideas in government ehh! This will cure the American Obama problem and ruin Trudeau's play dates for years to come as I'm pretty sure neither Hillary or Trump are compatible with whatever is putting the wave in Justin's hair.

I have safely ignored Justin Trudeau, (Shiny Pony), for decades and no harm will come from continuing this practice. Canada is, in Douglas Adam's immortal words, "mostly harmless." It's one of the things I love about the country. It balances out the

smug, preening, holier than thou, moral posturing that erupts from many Canadians when presented with conundrums like Trump. Batman's nemesis the Joker said it best, "Why so serious?" Canadians take themselves more seriously than the Danes. If you've ever lived in Denmark you'll understand.

Unfortunately, the United States is not mostly harmless. It matters *a little bit* who is elected President. It doesn't matter nearly as much as many Americans think and we can praise the all squiggling [Flying Spaghetti Monster](#) for that. Living under a hubris-infused narcissist like Obama would be far worse if we didn't have the luxury of ignoring him. And this brings me to Hillary, (Hildabeast), and Trump. It's going to be difficult to ignore either one of them, and sadly [None of the Above](#), my preferred candidate, is not on the ballot. This is a problem.

My solution, as always, revolves around who I hate the most. Animus is my animating principle. Trump is a bombastic tool, but, at least, I don't want to hold his head under water until it stops making nagging noises. The prospect of four years of [Hildabeast barking](#) is profoundly depressing. The bitch must be stopped so I'm resorting to extreme measures. Next week I'll cast a primary vote for that old 1960s era western hippie-commie, Bernie Sanders. Sanders has no chance of winning the presidency in November. If by some miracle, he ends up as the Democrat nominee he will be crushed by whatever crawls out of the Republican swamp.

I almost feel sorry for Bernie. Like all 1960s era western hippie-commies, he's a weird mixture of earnest naiveté and historical ignorance. Western hippie-commies differ from their real eastern counterparts. They've never held power, never run anything of importance, and have a serious marketing problem!

Anyone, even remotely cognizant of 20th-century history, will find it hard to overlook the vast pile of corpses various communist and socialist regimes piled up. We're not really sure how many tens of millions died at the hands of Stalin, Mao, Kim Il-Sung, Pol Pot and lesser thugs but it exceeds the toll exacted by the Nazi's. This is beyond historical dispute. You can whine, attempt to change the subject, and hurl as many epithets as you want but it won't change this nasty fact. People's regimes are demonstrably bad for people.

Western hippie-commies like Sanders know this so they rebrand themselves as socialists. Socialists believe that if you only do communism right none of the brutal side effects will accrue. You can have somebody else's cake and eat it too. This is naïve. Ask anyone in Venezuela about the wonders of 21st-century socialism. While you're at it, explain how the socialism of Bernie Sanders differs from the socialism of Hugo Chavez. Spoiler alert: it doesn't!

A primary vote for Sanders is mostly harmless. It's like sticking a cocklebur on [Pussydent Hildabeast](#)'s hideous hide. Still it amuses me? I must take solace somewhere. Let's Bern the Witch!



The Santa Fe Trail

Posted: 18 Apr 2016 23:41:35

In the last ten years, we've moved five times.⁵¹ In a few days, I will increment that count. We are moving to Santa Fe New Mexico. Our previous perambulations were driven by work. We went where the jobs were and they were all over.

Because I have spent a lifetime moving for work I have no patience or sympathy for people who insist on staying put.

"I can't leave here because ... blah, blah, blah," said every lazy whiner ever.

If you have to move to find a job get off your fat ass and move. Humans evolved on the move. Our distant ancestors trekked great distances foraging and hunting. We are happiest when moving. Putting down roots is for plants, not people. *I'll eventually settle down when I'm dead.* Until then I am on the move.

Moving is old hat; what's different this time is picking a place first. For over twenty-five years I've been a *wandering software developer*. This is beyond idiotic. The most portable stuff in the world is software. The internet makes it possible to create software anywhere and deploy it everywhere almost cost-free. There's no need to pile programmers into pits to extract bits. Theoretically, all software developers could work remotely, but in case you haven't noticed, we don't live in a theoretical world.

It's easier for management to impose discipline and administer idiocies like SOX compliance if uppity developers are in the same room. Remote discipline is too easily

⁵¹Frequent moves are a good way to dodge jury duty.



We are building a little house in the hills near Santa Fe. We will have unimpeded views of the mountains to the north. The lack of street lights, combined with Santa Fe's two thousand meter elevation, should make for decent stargazing.

mitigated with the mute button meaning management must come up with good ideas to herd their far-flung cats. Some enlightened outfits successfully manage productive remote developers but frankly most are struggling or openly hostile to the idea.

When it first occurred to me, way back in the 1980s, that commuting to an actual office was unnecessary I thought that within a decade or two most software development organizations would embrace remote work. The cost savings and enhanced access to global talent seemed like total no-brainers. Well, for many reasons, some good, (like getting smart people together), and some stupid, (see SOX), the brave new world of ubiquitous remote workers remains an infuriating work in progress.

I expect this muddle to eventually resolve but in the meanwhile, I am no longer willing to abide locales that do not suit me. So, for this move, we picked a spot, Santa Fe, that mostly meets our esoteric geographic preferences and then started looking for a job. Santa Fe is a small city so it took a little longer to find a good job but this thing called the internet also simplifies job hunting.

I've enjoyed my Saint Louis sojourn but like many [Missourians of the 19th century](#), it's time to head down the Santa Fe Trail.

Milliblog: Photo Captions

Posted: 22 May 2016 22:35:58

This blog is still alive and kicking. I post when I post. Currently, my energies are deployed on other fronts. If you absolutely must get your [Analyze the Data not the Drivel](#) fix look over my extensive [millibloggy photo captions](#). Here's a typical example:



The “miraculous staircase” in Santa Fe’s Loretto Chapel. After paying your three dollar entrance fee you can enter the chapel and see the staircase. When I was there people were milling around while a recorded message told the breathless story of the miraculous staircase. The story goes something like this. The chapel needed a staircase. So some nuns prayed to the sky fairy of carpenters and low and behold a carpenter showed up with a bag of simple tools. Over the next month this remarkably skilled carpenter fashioned this beautiful wood staircase using only his simple tools. Apparently he constructed the staircase from the floor to the upper level without central supports. Even now the staircase lacks the standard central beam of spiral staircases. The masses were amazed! How could the staircase stand without a central support? Surely this is the work of the divine. This is what passes for a miracle among sky fairy believers. It’s the same type of magical thinking that invokes aliens to explain the pyramids. Just maybe the carpenter knew what he was doing and had the technique to pull it off. Occam’s razor people: it cuts deep.

Falling Colors Technology a BHSD Crony that needs Competition

Posted: 05 Jul 2016 20:13:36

BHSD ([Behavioral Health Services Division](#)) is a New Mexico state agency that doles out federal and state funds to a variety of small, ostensibly health related, programs. For example, in the state of New Mexico, BHSD runs a program called [Synar](#)⁵² that attempts to cut down on merchants selling cigarettes to minors. One Falling Colors employee characterized the program as “mostly stick and no carrots.” Synar funds a stable of ambush inspectors that descend on merchants hoping to catch them selling to minors. It’s a standard bit of well-intentioned government coercion. If you are wondering what’s in it for the merchants stop wondering: it’s all stick. They lose sales and face fines. If you are wondering why the state of New Mexico supports Synar follow the money. Depending on the dubious statistics compiled by Synar administrators the state could lose millions of dollars of federal grants if the percentage of offending merchants exceeds an arbitrary threshold. Synar, in the twisted minds of state bureaucrats, “generates revenue.”

In addition to saving the state from the unconscionable scourge of teenage smoking BHSD also funds a mishmash of programs to prevent drug addiction, help the mentally ill, subsidize methadone treatments and reimburse psychologists, psychiatrists and other health professionals for counseling and other services. BHSD’s budget for all these operations is, according to Mindy Hale, roughly fifty million dollars per year. In the greater wasteful schemes of government this is small beans, even for New Mexico, but, it’s still fifty million public dollars so it’s not out-of-bounds to ask, what are the taxpayers getting for their money?

If you are naïve enough to think the intended *clients* of BHSD’s largesse, the teenage smokers, the mentally ill, and the drug addicts, garner the lion’s share of that fifty million dollars you’re probably a statist or a moron, but [I repeat myself](#). Many years ago a wise old wag, when badgered about the high cost of landing a man on the moon, chirped, “None of that money was spent on the moon!” While some of BHSD’s fifty million is directed to clients, *the moon*, the lion’s share goes to contractors, service providers, and BHSD internals. Whether the state of New Mexico and the federal government are getting good value for their money is debatable; what’s not debatable is that some IT service providers are doing very well from themselves.

⁵²The Synar program is named after Congressman Mike Synar of Oklahoma. How many tax dollars would be saved if it was illegal to name things after politicians?



The Falling Colors Technology Logo. This logo was designed by a competent graphic designer. I've observed an inverse relationship between the quality of company logos and the products and services they offer.

Two IT providers consume a significant share of BHSD IT funds: [Optum New Mexico](#) and [Falling Colors Technology](#). The founders of Falling Colors, Mindy Hale and Pamela Koster⁵³, claim Optum bills the state of New Mexico roughly four million dollars per year for the onerous job of cutting checks. It's important to understand that Optum is not dispensing their own money. They are simply managing a pool of funds that are replenished by state and federal tax dollars. Yes, it takes money to manage money. You have to pay auditors, comptrollers, and other financial professionals to make sure the funds are not redirected into questionable pockets. Surely you don't think New Mexico's corruption free government would abscond with unwatched dollars?

Still, four million seems a bit steep for providing a routine service that any experienced financial entity like a bank could do, and to the state's credit, they have recognized this and are in the process of renegotiating Optum's four million dollar fee. Optum has responded with a "this isn't worth the damn hassle" attitude. If they cannot get their four million they're threatening to pull out of the state and cede the check cutting business to others. How much of this is hardball negotiating, corporate whining, or even *the truth*, is hard to determine. The only thing that seems certain is that there is a business opportunity for an IT provider if Optum makes good on their threat and leaves New Mexico.

Falling Colors Technology, a little company that is already extracting about one million dollars per year from the state, is angling to take over Optum's fund disbursement role. *In standard insider crony fashion, they hope to keep this transfer quiet and elude potential competitors.* Why go through all that messy inefficient public bidding? There's only one problem with their *business plan*. *Falling Colors has absolutely no experience managing funds.* There is nobody on their staff that could be considered a financial professional. They are planning to hire staff, but I have to wonder why BHSD, and the state of New Mexico, are considering flushing millions of dollars

⁵³The founders of Falling Colors are questionable sources; their claims should be subjected to a high standard of scrutiny.

through an entity that has no financial expertise and has already received a formal letter of warning for shoddy IT work.

Instead of branching out into lines of business that they have no experience with Falling Colors efforts would be better invested in fixing their core problems and they have lots of core problems. Let's look at what nearly one million dollars or public funds per year buys from Falling Colors Technology.

Your one million is buying a few unreliable, crash prone, insecure, low volume websites geared towards BHSD staff and service providers. When I first ran the following SQL query on the database that backs many Falling Colors websites I was alarmed at the results.

```
SELECT iq.WeekNumber ,
       AVG(iq.ErrorCount) AS AvgWeekErrors ,
       MIN(iq.ErrorCount) MinWeekErrors ,
       MAX(iq.ErrorCount) AS MaxWeekErrors ,
       STDEV(iq.ErrorCount) AS StdDevWeekErrors
  FROM ( SELECT      CAST(CONVERT(VARCHAR(8), TimeUtc, 112) AS INTEGER) AS DayNumber ,
                   COUNT(1) AS ErrorCount ,
                   MIN(DATEPART(iso_week, TimeUtc)) AS WeekNumber
        FROM      dbo.ELMAH_Error
        GROUP BY  CAST(CONVERT(VARCHAR(8), TimeUtc, 112) AS INTEGER)
      ) iq
 GROUP BY iq.WeekNumber
```

Falling Colors websites were crashing about twenty times per day. On some days the crash count exceeded fifty. I thought to myself, "If this doesn't dramatically improve this little company is doomed." I've worked with lots of bug infested software over my long career but twenty to fifty crashes per day, distributed over a few dozen users, was an entirely new level of unreliability.

Why is it so bad? The developers at Falling Colors, like developers everywhere, bitched about "inherited code." Basically, this means they're working with code that they didn't entirely write themselves. Developers complaining about inherited code is so common that software managers rightly label it whining. Software developers bitching about inherited code is like civil engineers griping about inherited bridges. The world is not created fresh every day. The inherited code base is a source of problems but the main reason Falling Colors exhibits such a high crash rate is simply a lack of formal quality control.

Testing at Falling Colors is mostly performed by one beleaguered Business Analyst.

She runs through a series of basic web page checks after significant new releases. This is a very low standard of testing for modern software development. Falling Colors does not practice many common quality control techniques. For example, most development environments support a variety of internal testing tools. Falling Colors is a Visual Studio shop and Visual Studio has built-in unit testing tools and supports a host of third-party add-ons. Developers focused on quality, spend as much time implementing internal units test as they do writing production code. There is an entire coding regime known as [TDD](#) that strongly promotes writing tests before you write software to pass the tests. At the end of June 2016, there were precisely zero internal unit tests in Falling Color's code base. In addition to missing internal unit tests, there were no repeatable or scripted tests, no large case tests, and no stress tests. Lack of formal testing combined with misplaced developer optimism is a recipe for high error rates and Falling Colors is really boiling that pot.

Buggy insecure low volume websites are a dime a dozen. There's a lot of crap out there. If Falling Colors cranked out standard public websites we would *click on* and ignore their rubbish. Unfortunately, being intertwined with BHSD, the users of Falling Colors websites do not have the option of *clicking on*. Making things worse, Falling Colors hosts a substantial amount of [HIPAA](#) protected information.

HIPAA is a set of federal guidelines that outline how health providers and their contractors must protect information that might be used to uniquely identify people. HIPAA penalties, for both providers and individuals, are severe if protected information is either accidentally or willfully disclosed. You can go to jail for exposing HIPAA protected information.

HIPAA guidelines [list common data elements](#) that must be protected. There is only one way to properly protect these elements: *full element encryption*. Every single data element should be encrypted and the keys should be rigorously guarded by a small number of individuals. Even developers, *especially developers*, should never see the unencrypted information. This is the way things should work, but, if you have followed the news about an unending stream of website hacks and data breaches, you're probably aware that this is not how it works in the big nasty world.

It's certainly not the way things are working at Falling Colors. With the exception of website passwords, which were only hashed in the last year,⁵⁴ HIPAA data is stored in plain, ready to hack, text. If I were an IT savvy methadone user in the state of New Mexico I would be reluctant to disclose personal information to *CareLink*, *TreatFirst*, *Prevention*, or any of the Falling Colors managed programs. One HIPAA breach and

⁵⁴Yes, incredibly, user passwords were stored as plain text for years. This is monumentally inept!

your methadone habit is on Facebook.

Falling Colors is fully cognizant of their shabby security and are planning to *eventually* fix it. They're taking steps to harden their websites and tighten up their loose databases but they are not, as of the end of June 2016, pursuing a full element encryption regime. Anything short of full element encryption is just putting lipstick on the security pig. Currently, Falling Colors is a HIPAA breach in waiting. *BHSD would be well advised to insist on an immediate and independent full security audit of Falling Colors systems!*

BHSD should also demand a fair and public RFP (Request for Proposal) process when seeking IT contracting services. Currently, some individuals in BHSD, in connivance with Falling Colors, are delicately crafting RFPs that are designed to exclude Falling Colors competitors. This is a blatant abuse of the public RFP process and the perpetrators should be ashamed of themselves. Crony state contracting may be business as usual in New Mexico but it is not in the interests of the public, BHSD, or even Falling Colors. Cronies without competition invariably turn into parasites and BHSD, which recently suffered a bedbug outbreak in their Santa Fe offices, has enough of those.

A Bloggy Christmas Letter

Posted: 25 Dec 2016 21:18:40

It's been a year of blogging badly so I might as well end it with a Christmas letter. I won't excuse my absence from these bloggy pages; I have repeatedly warned my readers that I blow hot and cold. I am either all in or all out. For most of 2016 blogging has been *off the agenda*.

In April, I traded my secure well-paying job in St. Louis Missouri for a risky venture in Santa Fe New Mexico. It was a crazy move. The money was about the same, but everything else, benefits, long-term prospects, working conditions, and career opportunities were worse. I didn't care. I was coming up on six years in St. Louis: my longest stretch in any job, and I was looking for any opportunity to move.

I've changed jobs a lot over my long so-called career. I've left voluntarily, I've been downsized, and I've been fired. Being fired is the most dramatic and educational of the three. I was fortunate to be fired from my first "serious" job. I was young, dumb, fearful, and easily taken advantage of. Getting fired fixed all that. You don't understand the working world until you've been fired. I'd recommend it for



Resting on a petrified stump on the trail. Old farts require more rest stops on the way up. I am so glad that trail running was not a thing when I was young. I didn't see any trail runners in Yellowstone today. The presence of bears, wolves and mountain lions, all of which can run trails a lot faster than millennial showoffs, puts the brakes on such behavior.

everyone. Getting fired provides lifetime immunity to one of mankind's most crippling conditions: fear of change. I don't fear change; I seek it out. Moving to New Mexico was a change for change's sake. The only thing unusual about this move was a fixed destination.

In the past, I went where the money was. This time my wife was largely responsible for the location. She was tired of apartment living in St. Louis. We considered buying a house in the area but we didn't view St. Louis as "home." I wanted to live somewhere in the affordable mountain west and she wanted somewhere warm. Santa Fe was warm, mountainous, and, if my new job went well, just barely affordable. So we sold off our bags, packed up my photography gear, and moved west.

Things did not work out. My new job imploded a week before closing on the house we were building. For months we had watched the construction and we were just about to move in when the deal collapsed. I almost enjoyed the predicament. On my birthday, I found myself, unemployed, homeless and uninsured, but at least I had my health! Never undervalue your health.

We scrambled and quickly moved to [Bozeman Montana](#) to stay with my father. Since my mother's death three years ago he has spent his summers in Bozeman alone. He was glad to have some company and we were glad to have a place to stay while I resumed the chore of looking for another job. I didn't mind our summer in Bozeman. We hiked a lot, visited [Yellowstone](#) a few times, drove up to [Glacier National Park](#), visited [Missoula](#) and [Butte](#), and took lots of pictures. I also spent many hours



Evelyn, my mother as a teenager, holding baby Tommy. I have no idea who baby Tommy is but I am pleased with the restoration of this old slide of Hazel's. I am generally dissatisfied with most of my restoration work but every now and then you come close to the image in your head.

scanning, restoring, and annotating old family slides. I found some real gems like this shot of my mother as a young teenager with baby “Tommy.”

It took me a few months to find another job because I refused to consider contracting or benefit free employers. Programming jobs are plentiful but programming jobs with stable employers that offer good benefits are not as plentiful as they used to be. Programming’s halcyon days are over. Modern trends are all negative and I fear that Trump will not make programming great again. In thirty years AI systems will replace all but the most brilliant and creative of programmers. Corporate IT drones, like *moi*, will join the dinosaurs.

Fortunately, being an old fart, I no longer care about long-term trends. I will be comfortably dead before global warming melts the ice caps and drowns coastal cities. I will also be retired and parasitically feasting on a plethora of millennial and gen-X funded social security programs when AIs decimate the ranks of ordinary programmers. My only concerns are short term. So I was pleased to find a good, *benefit endowed*, job in Meridian Idaho. Meridian is a growing suburb of Boise. Meridian is not as attractive as Santa Fe but the beauty of Idaho’s landscape matches New Mexico’s. Idaho is actually more mountainous than New Mexico and housing is more affordable. The funds we were about to plow into a New Mexico house will instead buy a larger fraction of a larger house in Idaho. It’s not the mountain state we aimed for but the skiing is better, (it’s a winter freaking wonderland outside as I write), plus the Pacific coast and Yellowstone are both within an easy drive. It will do for now.

In the coming year, I will strive to blog more often. I see many stark raving diatribes in your future, but as Hillary voters just painfully *discovered*,⁵⁵ the worm does not always turn as expected.

⁵⁵It was tempting to use the word “learned” but deplorables of the left have no need of learning; they already know it all?

2017

My Final Facebook Fuckoff

Posted: 08 Jan 2017 01:41:28

It's the start of a new year and much has changed. This week we moved into a new house. Our move has been an eight month and four state ordeal but I am hoping we will be here for some time. I am tired of moving and our frequent moves are confusing our self-appointed digital overlords. This afternoon, after unpacking and assembling the table I am now writing on, I tried to login to Facebook using a borrowed library hotspot. The Boise Library consortium is now lending out Internet Hotspot devices. My wife put one on hold about a month ago and she got an email the other day that the device was ready to be picked up at the Eagle branch. It will be a week or two before our local broadband supplier can wire up our new house so the hotspot perfectly hit our Internet dead spot. We picked it up and I'm using it now.

Getting back to Facebook. My login attempt failed. Facebook detected yet another change in my connection IP address and asked me to verify my account. I've done this before. I was expecting a text or reset email but no, this time the bastards had the sheer unmitigated gall to ask for proper government ID. They want scans of driver's licenses, passports, social security cards and so forth. This was the last straw. I couldn't even login to delete my account so I sent this message to security@facebookmail.com.

Dear Security at Facebook,

It's so good of you to ask if I was trying to access my account from a new IP. Yes, that new login attempt was me. For reasons that do not concern you I move around a lot. It's irritating that you track IPs and harass users when they go to another coffee shop or library.

This has happened in the past and I have jumped through your irritating hoops to reset the account. Prior to, today you did not ask for PROPER GOVERNMENT ID! There is no fucking way in hell I will be uploading scans of driver's licenses, passports, social security numbers, or any other form of official ID. It's bad enough that proper authorities force us to use these documents but, the last time I looked Facebook is not an authority! We don't have to show proper ID to vote in many states but apparently it's required to browse your steaming pile of distracting rubbish.



My Facebook profile image. Apparently, it is no longer ok to use avatar images on Facebook. I started using this image a few years ago primarily to screw with their facial recognition programs. I will not aid and abet Facebook user profiling. I am not hiding you can browse scores of my pictures by clicking on the gorrilla. Of course, these images are not under the legal purview of Facebook so they cannot legally use them for profiles.

I have always hated Facebook and the only reason I have maintained my tiny footprint in your sewer is to catch a little gossip from real friends and family members. I have done my best to keep my friend list short, my security options on maximum, and my profile information scant and useless. I know you are a giant data mining operation. You entice idiots with cat videos then quietly monitor their mostly boring and pointless lives with the sole aim of selling this information to third parties. Well, count me out! This will be the last byte stream from moi. If I could login I would delete my account but I since I will not change my lovely gorilla profile picture or give proper ID I will have to simply orphan my account. I have already deleted my phone app and purged my browsers of your vile links. I will never login to Facebook again.

I always knew this day was coming. I had long ago decided to drop Facebook when a few family members tired of your trash. I don't waste a lot of time on Facebook, but be honest, even you know it's nothing but a complete waste of time.

In this case, parting is not sweet sorrow, it's like being released from an insane asylum.

Anonymously yours

John D. Baker

Affinity Photo Review

Posted: 22 Jan 2017 23:40:20

There's a new image processor on my computers. Recently the chief developer of one of my favorite image editors, [Picture Window Pro](#) (PWP), sent out a sad email letting all PWP users know that he is stopping PWP development. He thanked us for over twenty years of support and as a last gift converted the final version of PWP to freeware. You can now download and run Picture Window Pro without a key. PWP is a superb program! It's still the fastest and meanest image editor I have ever used and I am constantly trying image editors. If you're interested in getting a free copy of PWP download the program before the distribution website shuts down.

I was saddened by this news but all good things eventually end. With PWP going away I decided, for the nth time, to look for alternatives. I reconsidered Photoshop. I've used full-blown Photoshop but frankly, I've never been impressed. It's expensive and slow! I use an old copy of Photoshop Elements, mainly to remove blemishes on film scans, but in my opinion, the only Adobe image processing product worth paying for is [Lightroom](#). Adobe is the evil image processing empire. They squeeze you with sluggish performance and abusive subscription payment models and then act like they're doing you a favor. It didn't take me very long to abandon Photoshop (again) and keep looking for PWP alternatives. Lucky for me there's this thing called [DuckDuckGo](#) that quickly led me to [Affinity Photo](#).

Affinity Photo is a relatively new image editor that got started in the Mac world and, as of November 2016, is also available for 64 bit Windows systems. Affinity has snagged dozens of [positive reviews](#) and, unlike Photoshop, is reasonably priced. I decided to give myself a little Christmas present and bought Affinity Photo.

The Affinity Windows download file is large: over 200 megabytes. Affinity Windows depends on [.Net 4.6.2](#) which is also installed if it's not on your machine. It took a few minutes to suck down and install all the required bytes but things went smoothly and I eagerly started the program.

Before relating my impressions of Affinity Photo I will describe my *binary image format philosophy*. Image editors typically create and manipulate vendor specific proprietary binary image files. Binary image files like PSDs, NEFs, DNGs, and now Affinity's AFPHOTOS, have a nasty tendency to evolve on vendor whim. This poses fundamental long-term image storage problems. Even if you conscientiously backup and archive your original image files you may discover, a decade hence, that you can no longer load them with current software. I hate this! *Photography is for the*

ages, not the marketing cycles of software and camera companies! If you have ever wondered why the lowly JPG image format still reigns supreme despite its abundant technical deficiencies stop wondering. The JPG format is an open and well described eight-bit channel format. Any competent programmer can write software to read and write JPGs. The same holds for TIFs, PNGs and a few other open formats. This is not true for vendor dominated formats. The specifications, even if disclosed, can change on a moment's notice.

How can photographers deal with *transient* binary image formats? There are two basic approaches. You can convert all your images to an open image format. Some photographers convert camera RAW files to high bit TIFs. Converting large numbers of image files is a tedious and resource hungry process but it's probably the best bet for long-term storage. I use the second lazier approach: maintain at least two independent image programs that can read and write the binary image formats you work with. I use Nikon cameras; they crank out proprietary NEF binaries. Currently, I have four programs on this machine that can read NEFs: PWP, Lightroom, Affinity and [ThumbsPlus](#). I will tolerate proprietary binaries *if and only if* I have options. Don't let software and camera companies box you in.

I started using image editors about fifteen years ago. My first editor came with my first digital camera: a one megapixel HP. I cannot remember the name of this program; I only used it long enough to discover its appalling deficiencies. Within a week I had purchased my first version of Photoshop Elements (PE). I was happy with PE until I encountered [posterization](#) (read the link for the gory technical details). Posterization wrecks prints and it's easy to posterize eight-bit channel images. The answer then, as it is now, is to increase your working bit depth. Adobe recommended upgrading from PE to full Photoshop. Why fork over \$70 bucks when you can fork over \$500? Photoshop Elements has a long history of half-assed support for sixteen-bit channel images and the reason is painfully obvious. If Photoshop Elements fully embraced sixteen-bit channel images there would be very little need for full Photoshop. You could save yourself hundreds of dollars. Adobe decided not to compete with themselves and adopted the time-tested pseudo-monopolistic practice of sodomizing the customer. I did not embrace the [butthurt](#)! I started looking for low-cost programs that properly handled sixteen-bit images. It didn't take me long to find PWP.

This early experience shaped my entire image processing approach. Instead of adopting a single monolithic "industry standard" program and joining the *nerd herd* I decided to go my way and use many small programs. Instead of a Goliath, I went

with many Davids.⁵⁶ When you take the David approach interoperability moves to the top of the stack. The output of one program must effortlessly become the input of another. How programs play together matters. Additionally, when you apply the David approach, you never look to completely replace your tool set. General purpose tools like Affinity may be able to do all the things more specialized tools can do but probably not as efficiently or as well.

So, before adding Affinity to my trusted tools I asked:

1. Does Affinity play nice with others?
2. Is Affinity's user interface (UI) tolerable?
3. Does Affinity streamline common tedious tasks?
4. What new capabilities does Affinity offer?

With these points in mind let's look at Affinity Photo.

Does Affinity play nice with others?

One of the first things I look for in image processors is *tolerable* loading times. Part the reason I've never been able to stick with full Photoshop is because it takes forever to get the damn thing up. Affinity on Windows easily beats full Photoshop but it's still slower than good old C coded PWP. PWP comes up in a flash. It's one of the many reasons I stuck with it for over a decade. Affinity's loading speed is comparable to [GIMP](#), Photoshop Elements and Lightroom: fast enough to not drive me crazy.

After loading Affinity, I immediately started testing the program's ability to read and write sixteen-bit TIF files. The basic single layer sixteen-bit TIF file format is one of the best supported lossless image formats. It's often the only way to move information from one program to another without trashing bits. JPGs are universal, but every time you write a JPG you lose data: that's the [lossy part of JPG](#) compression. Lossy image formats are fine for the web and final presentation but are a total disaster for image editing. Affinity can read and write sixteen-bit TIFs. It can also read and write a number of other important formats like Photoshop Elements PSDs. Affinity converts PSD layers to AFPHOTO layers. It also handles JPGs, PNGs and many RAW formats like Nikon's NEFs. *Affinity plays well with others.*

Is Affinity's user interface UI tolerable?

Once I had satisfied myself that I could slosh bits through Affinity I started evaluating

⁵⁶If you remember what happened to Goliath siding with David doesn't seem like much of a risk.

the program's user interface. UIs have ruined many editors. I'm immediately suspicious when reviewers start lauding a program's UI before spending a few hundred hours using it. UIs either help or hinder. Affinity's UI is decent. If you have ever used a layer oriented image editor you will quickly adjust to how Affinity works. [I strongly recommend watching the Affinity tutorial videos](#); they are among the best video tutorials I've seen and quickly show what the program can do.

Once Affinity is loaded it's pretty zippy. Common image handling operations are fast enough to *fly under my annoyance radar*. Image processing can be very demanding. Don't expect to stitch 500-megabyte panoramas from original RAW files instantly. With current hardware and software, some things will take time. It's fair to say that Affinity's performance compares favorably to other image processors. *I can put up with Affinity's user interface.*

Does Affinity streamline common tedious tasks?

After playing with Affinity for a few days I used the program to help restore some old scanned slides. Old pictures are always damaged; they all need a bit, or a lot, of retouching. The problems most people associate with old pictures, tears, color changes, and loss of tone are usually easily fixed in most editors. The biggest job is removing thousands of scratches, spots, and stains. Most restorers give up and crop or blur away such defects but I'm with Lady Macbeth: "out, out damn spots." Any tool that helps me hunt down and exterminate spotty pests will be lovingly embraced.

The Affinity [inpainting brush](#) works a lot better than the corresponding Photoshop Elements healing brush. In particular, it crosses linear backgrounds, buildings, fabric patterns, and so forth without unduly destroying detail. Removing long linear scratches that cross regular structured detail is a soul draining chore. Whenever I see such defects I typically give up and find another picture to restore; I have a big backlog of scans awaiting restoration! This slide (see page 319) of the southern end of Beirut Lebanon, taken by my

father in 1968, is typical of many images in my backlog. There were dozens of long linear scratches running through the buildings. It would have taken hours to fix them with PE. All it took was a few passes with Affinity's inpainting brush to remove them. I was impressed. This single tool significantly speeds up restoring scratched and spotted images and justifies Affinity's purchase price all by itself.

Another Affinity tool that streamlines common image processing tasks is the Affinity panorama tool. Most modern image editors have fairly decent panorama tools and



I am still exploring the Affinity Photo image editor. I used it to restore this scan of a Kodachrome slide my father shot from a hotel window of the south coast of Beirut Lebanon in 1968. The Continental Hotel is visible in the lower left corner of this image. My mother often stayed in the Continental when she visited me in Beirut. I fondly remember having continental breakfast in the Continental. The original slide was overexposed and covered with splotches and sky fingerprints. The retouching tools in Affinity Photo are better than corresponding tools in Photoshop Elements. I particularly like the Affinity inpainting brush; it works well on textured and linear subjects. I was able to remove long scratches cutting through the buildings in this image without unduly wrecking building detail. I also used the inpainting tool to remove a cutoff street light and a car it was shading on the bottom of the image. It's easier to remove objects with Affinity Photo than it is in Photoshop Elements.

building a panorama is easier than it used to be. In the image editing Dark Age, you had to manually select control points and master blend masks to build decent panoramas. It could take hours to align a single image. Current editors use effective automatic control point detection and advanced blending algorithms. In most cases, it's a simple matter of using good capture technique followed by loading the individual images into a panorama tool to generate decent to excellent results.

We are living in a panoramic golden age but there are still problems. I shoot entirely in RAW because RAW preserves the most information and affords the greatest post processing options. Panoramas often encompass scenes of high contrast. Image tones will vary from extremely bright to very dark. It's not uncommon for ordinary panoramas to span twelve or more stops of dynamic range. When processing high dynamic range pictures it's extremely advantageous to do all your work on sixteen-bit or thirty-two-bit channel images. Blending eight-bit panoramas can release *the posterization Kraken*; trust me, you don't want that monster savaging your scenes.

Unfortunately, the Photoshop Elements panorama tool is inherently eight-bit. This means I must do all my major tone adjustments in Lightroom before panorama stitching. Adjusting the tones of a single image is tedious, doing it for many panorama frames is cruel and unusual punishment. Adobe's answer is always the same; give us a lot of money and we'll release you from eight-bit Hell! Lucky for us Affinity gets us out of eight-bit panorama Hell for a lot less.

This panorama (see page 321) of the mountains near the eastern entrance of Glacier National Park was directly generated from Nikon NEF RAW files. All feature detection and blending calculations were high-bit. Tone adjustments were aided by regular tone mapping. Tone mapping is like an automatic Zone System. Compared to what I used to put up with ten years ago Affinity panorama building is almost as easy as scanning scenes with an iPhone. *Affinity significantly streamlines routine retouching and panorama building.*

What new capabilities does Affinity offer?

So far, the features I've discussed are common to most image editors. Does Affinity offer anything new or special? There is one Affinity feature, the *FFT (Fast Fourier Transform) Denoise filter*, that greatly mitigates one of my long-standing retouching nightmares: regular patterns.

Many old portraits were printed on patterned paper. This image (see page 321) is a crop of an old (1935) baby picture of my mother.



Looking west from just outside the eastern side of Glacier National Park near Saint Mary. The weather was grim and dark, just the way I like it when I braved the rain to snap the frames that went into this panorama. I built this panorama directly from Nikon NEF files in the Windows version of Affinity Photo. My favorite image processor, Picture Window Pro, is being retired and I am exploring alternatives. I rather like this result.



My mother as a seven-week-old baby. This 1935 picture was printed on patterned paper. Patterned paper often adds luster and depth to photographs but it also makes it more difficult to retouch them. The Affinity Photo FFT (Fast Fourier Transform) Denoise filter can remove regular patterns without unduly softening images.

As you can see the entire picture is covered with tiny regular hexagons. Patterned prints were popular in the early and mid-20th century. The pattern adds depth and luster and has the nice side effect of making prints difficult to copy. Patterns also make retouching difficult. Retouching spots and scratches on patterned backgrounds tends to make them more, not less conspicuous. If only there was some way to remove the damn pattern before retouching. Affinity's [FFT Denoise](#) filter does just that.

I applied the FFT Denoise filter to my mother's baby picture and then ran through my regular retouching regime: see the before and after diptych on page [323](#).

Affinity Conclusion

Affinity, like PWP, is a great value. The first Windows version is already superior to every version of Photoshop Elements I've ever used. It's not as comprehensive as full Photoshop, but if you subtract the marginal features of Photoshop and keep the essential core elements, you've basically described Affinity's feature set. Affinity is a layer editor but it's not a Photoshop clone. The UI is completely modern, RAW development is built in, sixteen-bit layers are the default, and useful stack operations like automatic alignment are a click away. Affinity also supports [thirty-two-bit HDR](#) file formats and high dynamic range composites. There's a lot of bang for the buck: strongly recommended!

What is Required: Hybrid Books

Posted: 25 Mar 2017 17:15:25

It's time for another product suggestion. Last year I threw out the need for [caption printing on the back of photographs](#). It's an obvious thing to do but only a few vendors *partly support* backside caption printing. Eventually, the masses will notice this glaring deficiency, grab their pitchforks, and demand backside captions. We're not a very smart species but we can learn; especially if we're motivated by fear. Today's suggestion is little more esoteric and lacks the "aha-ness" of backside captions.

The world needs a way to combine the virtues of Books and eBooks.

If you read at all I don't need to convince you that books are nearly perfect. The near perfection of the printed book was brilliantly highlighted in Isaac Asimov's famous 1973 essay *The Ancient and the Ultimate*. [Asimov's essay](#) is not readily available on-line and that's too damn bad because he completely nailed it. *The Ancient and the Ultimate* should be required reading in English classes worldwide; it's that good!



For some restorations, the ones that please or annoy me, I create a before and after diptych. I want to convince myself that my restoration work was worthwhile. Most of the time the restored image is better but in more cases than I would like the original scan is superior. And, now and then, I cannot decide which one I like the best. This rendering of an old faded patterned print of my mother as a baby is one of those images. The original print is on patterned paper. The pattern imparts a quality that the restoration lacks. Ansel Adams once wrote that the negative is the score and the print is the performance. For restorers, the scan is the score and the restoration is the performance. Sometimes the music is glorious and clear and sometimes it's rap – rhymes with crap!

Plain old printed books are nearly perfect but nearly perfect is not perfect! eBooks do three things better than printed books.

1. **Duplication:** It's easy to copy eBooks.⁵⁷
2. **Portability:** You can carry entire eBook libraries around on your phone.
3. **Multimedia:** eBooks can easily embed sound recordings and video.

Printed books reign supreme when it comes to:

1. **Durability:** There are printed books that are hundreds of years old that are still *human-readable*. Binary formats and media are infuriatingly unstable. I've [complained about this in the past](#) and I will continue bitching until the long-term binary storage problem is solved.
2. **Privacy and Security:** eBook readers, cell phones, tablets, and laptops can be hacked. Plain old printed books do not spy on you or mutate while you're reading them. They also don't bombard you with hard to ignore advertisements.
3. **Aesthetics and Beauty:** Great printed books are extremely valuable works of art. It's going to be a long time before eBooks command such respect.

Given that eBooks have a few virtues that printed books do not the obvious question is, "Can we combine the two and form a more perfect book?" Of course, the answer is yes but, like I warned you with backside captions, don't hold your breath!

A proper Hybrid Book, or *hyBook*, will look, smell, and taste like a printed book. It will have all the glorious heft of a thick well-bound tome but embedded within its covers will be a machine readable version of the book. Ideally, the embedded digital version would be something like an [RFID](#) capable of storing a few gigabytes of data for at least two centuries without bit rot.⁵⁸ To maintain a high level of privacy and security the digital version must be completely off-line, passive, battery-free, immutable, and hashed with the hash prominently printed on a number of pages of the printed version. Such a hyBook would combine the virtues of the printed and digital worlds.

hyBooks, like their conventional printed cousins, would be durable and *human-readable*

⁵⁷This only applies to non-DRM'ed eBooks. [DRM](#)'ed eBooks are broken. They should be avoided at all costs and their publishers should be tarred and feathered and stuffed head first into septic tanks.

⁵⁸Currently, (March 2017), there is no cost-effective *durable and passive* technology that can store a digital image of a book within its covers for two centuries.

over long periods. This sharply contrasts with eBooks. *eBooks, with their lamentable DRM policies, geographic restrictions, user monitoring, oligopolistic pricing, and built in obsolescence are essentially self-burning books.* You cannot depend on eBook longevity because you don't control them; they can be conveniently [memory-holed](#) without warning. With hyBooks you are in control.

Finally, hyBooks mitigate the most important limitation of printed works: duplication difficulty. As we move into an increasing DRM'ed and censored future with every aggrieved party screaming for limitations on free speech it will become more important to preserve, duplicate, and distribute offensive, blasphemous, pornographic, and opprobrious *wrongthink!* With well-distributed and hidden hyBooks functioning as highly redundant off-line backups it will be extremely difficult for authorities to suppress ideas. Whenever some *twad*⁵⁹ forces the content of a hyBook off-line it will pop up again somewhere else. To memory-holing censors everywhere hyBooks will be like floating turds; one flush will never suffice. Is there any better recommendation than that?

FCC Follies and Monkey Browsing

Posted: 31 Mar 2017 04:03:15

There is much wailing on the [intertubes](#) about proposed changes to FCC Internet privacy rules. That horrible orange Russian stooge is desecrating the Lightbringer's enlightened decrees and the [usual suspects](#) are having boringly predictable conniption fits. Apparently, our Internet privacy is *now* under attack and horrible things will ensue. You poor dumb fucks. You have no Internet privacy; you never did! I'm amused by Obama worshippers wetting their pants over Internet privacy; didn't that entire Snowden thing happen while The One was pushing back the seas? Isn't it a tad hypocritical to whine about the FCC, a very little fish, when great whites, the NSA, CIA, et cetera, are feasting on fools?

Now pay attention, I am only going to explain this once. If you are concerned about Internet privacy you have to look out for yourself. The FCC is not going to help you. Congress will not rush to your aid. The President, orange or black, will not defend your interests. *Government, as it is currently constipated, only serves the donor class.* Unless you are injecting large bribes into "the political system" you do not have effective representation. I realize it sucks to be a peon but all is not lost. You don't have any Internet privacy but you are not powerless.

⁵⁹Twit asshole and dolt: pejorative invention is one of my many specialties.

The proposed change in FCC rules is predicated on the assumption that your browsing history is valuable? It seems there are profit driven corporations out there that care about how many cat videos you watch and whether you swipe left or right. They presume that with enough data mining of your clicks, tweets, and pokes they can craft cruise missile adds that will fly under your bullshit radar and score direct hits on your “buy our shit buttons.” This entire shaky premise can be trivially undermined by simple cheap peon countermeasures.

There are two basic approaches: VPN and Dirty Data.

If you want to stop Verizon, CenturyLink, Charter, Comcast or some other evil mega-corp ISP from recording your browsing history start using a VPN service. There are many VPN providers available now and this FCC ruling will probably encourage the formation of even more. See, the FCC is making VPN great again!

VPN prevents the man-in-the-middle from being able to view your browsing history but unfortunately, all this does is transfer your browsing history from a mega-corp ISP to a mega-corp VPN. If your VPN is in the good old *fuck-You-S-A* it could still sell your porn rights to the highest bidder. If you go with a VPN provider choose one that's based outside the US.

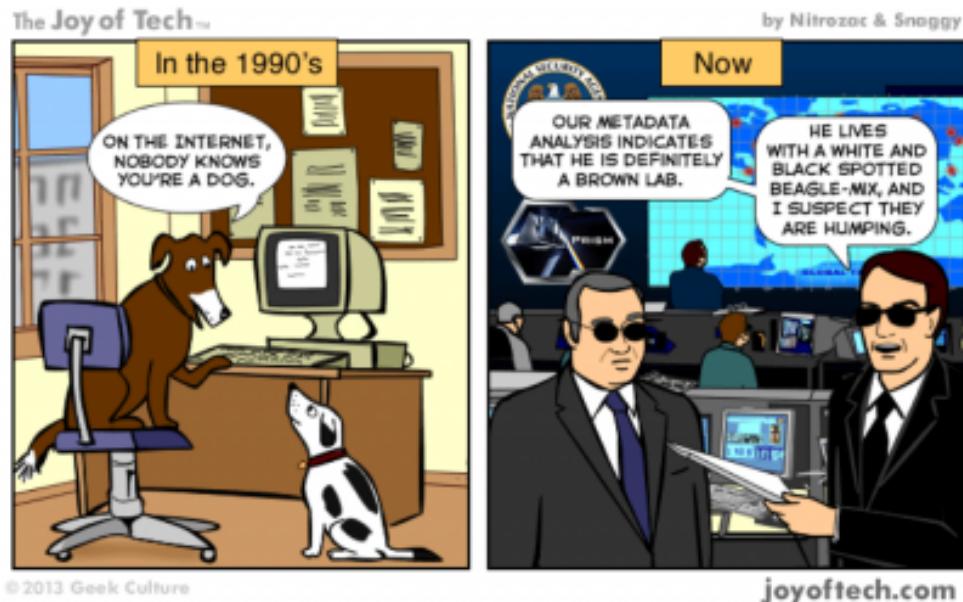
I'm a fan of VPN but if many peons start bypassing their mega-corp ISPs with VPN our ever-helpful government will probably amend the [abominable DMCA act](#) and declare the personal use of VPN an act of domestic terrorism! I know this sounds crazy but these days it's a criminal act in the United States for farmers [to fix their own damn tractors](#) if the repairs bypass or replace embedded device software. Yes, intellectual property rights are that screwed up!

VPN is a viable countermeasure *for now* but Dirty Data is a countermeasure for the ages. Dirty Data works by sabotaging data. The idea is simple, cheap and extremely effective. Before data miners can extract digital gold they have to purge the garbage in their databases. For most corporations cleaning data is an ongoing struggle. It's always time-consuming, expensive, and it always threatens the [ROI](#) of analytic projects. If there's too much shit in the ice cream the mixture tastes more like shit than ice cream. So how do you mix browsing history shit into mega-corp ISP ice cream?

If you have lots of free time and you really, really, hate your ISP, you can strike back with *monkey browsing*. Monkey browsing is an updated version of that famous monkey on the typewriter. To monkey browse, visit random websites and randomly click crap on each site. With judicious keystroke timing, it will be a royal pain for

your ISP to extract your real browsing history from your monkey browsing.

Of course, most of us can't devote a few hours a day to monkey browsing but fear not; the *monkey-browser-bots* are coming! It wouldn't be all that hard to automate monkey browsing. Many techniques would work. Trust me, in short order, an army of monkey-browser-bots will be delicately stirring shit into mega-corp ISP ice cream. When the signal to noise ratio exceeds mega-corp ISP ROI thresholds they'll stop trying to filter shit out of ice cream and move to the next corporate delusion. *Peon poop is powerful people!*



Only cartoons and comedians are allowed to tell the truth in our grievance seeking culture. It's not your grandmother's Internet anymore. Surveillance is a fact of life, and as sad as this sorry fact is cheer up! Half the idiots monitoring you are barely capable of locating their own buttholes with both hands and a flashlight. American intelligence agencies have been so wrong, so often, that it's a good idea to always discount whatever they're saying until there is overwhelming independent corroborating evidence. In the meanwhile, you can cheaply punk the "data" they are collecting. Remember, you can whine or undermine!

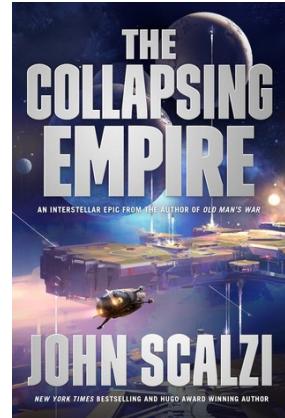
The Collapsing Empire: Goodreads Review

Posted: 26 Apr 2017 17:13:27

The Collapsing Empire (CE) is a breezy fun to read space opera. Because I rate books on Goodreads mostly on how much I enjoyed them I gave CE a solid four. If you're looking for a few hours away from planet moron (Earth) CE is worth the time. While I enjoyed CE it's unlikely I will be following this series as it unfolds in however many books the author and his publisher manage to flog in the future. I've reached the point in my life where entertainment is no longer sufficient. I demand new ideas and different ways of looking at things from what I read. By this standard CE barely rates a one.

The only moderately new notion here is that of "The Flow." The Flow is CE's magic element. It's the story element that enables a human interstellar civilization. The Flow plays the same role in CE that the ocean does in Moby Dick. The ocean is not considered a character in Moby Dick but try imagining the novel without it! Remove The Flow from CE and you are left with stock characters, stock court politics, stock predictable disputes, and a tiny little universe that, trust me, feels more stunted than a night spent under a clear dark sky looking at real stars.

As a final note: I'd advise the author to refrain from dispensing his opinions about real-world politics. Nothing ruins a book faster than conflating actual authors with their fictional characters. Many years ago I was on the verge of reading Anne Rice's vampire books but then I had the good luck to see an interview of Anne Rice going on about how her characters were her lovers. She wasn't being metaphorical; the woman is nuts. I decided right on the spot that it was unlikely such a delusional nitwit was worthy of my sustained attention. Authors labor under an unspoken Fight Club rule. "The first rule of fiction writing is: stay the Hell out of your fiction writing!"



What is Required: Citizen Environment Sampling Drones

Posted: 01 May 2017 00:34:14

We are well into the drone age. Not long ago drones served only deep-pocketed governments and corporations. This is still the case. Whenever you hear about drone strikes on wedding parties, oops terrorist gatherings, the "responsible" drone is probably a standard overpriced multimillion dollar product of the military industrial crony complex. Why dispatch terrorists with a few bullets when you can spend



It's an airborne "Drone-cue." The age of the drone is just getting started. These gadgets will be put to all sorts of uses. Monitoring the environment, with or without the permission of authorities, is an excellent use of drones.

millions of newly created and freshly taxed dollars instead? War may be hell but business is business.

If things had been left to the druthers of the crony crowd the cozy world of cost-plus drones would have lasted forever but then technology happened. Remember those annoying toy quadcopters that flew around the atriums of shopping malls just a few years ago. You probably thought, "That's a cute toy" Well those cheap little toys have grown up and are now [cleaning power lines with flame throwers](#), [carrying drugs across borders](#),⁶⁰ [smuggling contraband into prisons](#), [annoying eagles](#), [dropping grenades on ISIS](#), and [taking really great selfies](#).

Small inexpensive drones are being put to so many creative uses that it's beginning to worry our self-appointed overlords. You don't need crony connections and millions of dollars to launch drone attacks. Any moron with an iPhone and a drone can declare war on the ruling classes. Not many see it but we're entering a golden age of drone assassins. Small drones will continue to improve and diversify. They will fly further, faster and quieter. They will creep, climb, tunnel and bore through any obstacle. Whatever silly government legislation and anti-drone measures authorities concoct will be quickly countered and worked around. The drone genie, like strong encryption before it, is out of the bottle and it isn't going back in. *Basically, if you're somebody that needs killing a drone is being assigned your number right now.*

As much as I enjoy drone enabled asshole termination that's not what I am requiring today. If you've been paying attention to what's precisely labeled "fake news" you've probably noticed that a strange tweeting orange ogre has moved into the White House. Yes, it's the end of the world. One of the ogre's first outrages was to appoint like-minded ogres to allegedly important government posts. Imagine that!

Of great concern to "so-called" environmentalists is the ogre appointed to behead

⁶⁰The advent of drones highlights the utter stupidity of Trump's border wall. How high will the wall have to be to stop drones from flying over it? How many anti-drone-drones will need to be stationed along the wall to secure the border?



Critics of Trump's appointment of Scott Pruitt to head the EPA should keep in mind that the bar for "wrecking" the EPA has been set very low by the Obama administration. It was the EPA that turned the Animas River orange. Yes, it was an unfortunate accident, and sometimes you have to destroy the river in order to save it. Two states and the Navajo Nation are suing the EPA for gross negligence and incompetence and based on images like this I'm guessing they have a case.

the [EPA](#). This cruel EPA slayer is not drinking the Earth first Kool-Aid and appears determined to end the cushy pensioned sinecures of all the left-thinking, environment protecting, comrades. Like I said before, it's the end of the world. Apparently, after a few, and I mean a very few, underperforming EPA comrades are purged this critical government agency will become deaf, dumb and blind.⁶¹ All that wonderful EPA air and water quality data will no longer be collected. Only large infusions of newly created and freshly taxed money can prevent this apocalypse.

For Christ sakes, cry me an orange river!

If you really care about the environment get off your fat corn syrup enlarged ass and collect your own data with drones. I've listened to *cis-lefties* insist they are smarter, fitter and better looking than their evil *cis-righty* counterparts for years. Well, here's an opportunity to prove it. Instead of marching for science why don't you modify or build drones that can actually do science.

One of my favorite scenes in the movie [Erin Brockovich](#) shows our spunky girl-power heroine played by Julia Roberts⁶² sneaking onto the grounds of a power plant to clandestinely sample waste water ponds. She was caught and shooed away but not before she snagged water samples that contained Hexavalent Chromium: the same, *unnaturally occurring*, compound that also turned up in the drinking water of people living near the plant. What a coincidence? Erin may have been a spunky go getter

⁶¹Considering that the EPA is already deaf and dumb how bad can blind be?

⁶²I admit it; I've seen too many Julia Roberts movies. Like many mainly manly men, I have a thing for nice smiles and boobs and no amount of feminist nagging will change that.

but chemistry was the real hero.

Erin was taking a real risk sneaking onto “private property.” In many parts of the world, she would have been shot and dumped into the wastewater ponds. How many of us would take such a risk? If only there was a way to reduce the risks of clandestine sampling. If only there was a small, hard to detect, quiet, remote-controlled device that could fly into “forbidden zones”, sample areas of interest, and then fly out with physical evidence.

It wouldn’t be all that difficult to modify existing drones to do this. It would make a great science fair project. Think of how much better things would be if pinheaded SJWs stopped [enumerating new imaginary genders](#) and devoted their time and energy to mastering the technology required to build and operate sampling drones. Instead of being an embarrassing stain on humanity they might actually do some good.

Finally, combine clandestine drone sampling with [blockchain based unbannable binary file distribution](#) and it’s possible to create the type of “transparency” political buttholes are always blathering about but never actually provide.

I WannaCry about the Plunging Quality of Evil Geniuses

Posted: 18 May 2017 04:23:12

I have something to confess; I have no patience or sympathy for idiots. When imbeciles impale themselves on reality I smirk and guffaw. With such a nasty attitude it won’t surprise you to learn that I really enjoyed the recent [WannaCry Ransomware](#) cyber attack. Judging from the mewling soiled diaper press you might conclude civilization was dealt a death-blow and that idiot Trump is to blame.

What really happened?

1. The NSA “cataloged”⁶³ security flaw in Windows XP and didn’t inform anyone.
2. The flaw was leaked.
3. Hackers exploited the flaw to infect old Windows computers.
4. They encrypted files and tried to ransom victims using Bitcoin.

It's stupid all the way down!

⁶³It's not clear they discovered the flaw but however it was found they withheld it.

To begin, Windows XP is ancient. Microsoft spent years warning people to upgrade to more current versions of Windows. The warnings went on for years and years and years. Yet despite this relentless nagging an army of morons refused to upgrade. Now these shiftless dolts are blaming others.

“Microsoft should support obsolete crap forever for free.”

“Teresa May didn’t give us enough money to upgrade our computers.”

“What’s the point of rudimentary computer security when Trump is going to nuke us?”

Most WannaCry victims are suffering self-inflicted wounds. Let’s hope some of them bleed to death.

As for the NSA, that festering hive of evil geniuses, you would think they would have learned something from the strong encryption battles and the Snowden affair but apparently not. Judging from recent history the NSA stands for NOT SECURE AGENCY. They’re leaking more than a menstruating woman without sanitary napkins. The entire notion of stockpiling software defects to use at a later date is cosmically stupid because it presumes software is static. Software is always changing: sometimes for good reasons. Your backdoor will probably close with the next compiler or OS release. Some quality assurance drone may notice your favorite backdoor and release a patch. This happens all the time, just read the notices that accompany standard updates and patches. At best stockpiling defects is a short-term tactical gimmick. Frankly, I expect more from the deep thinkers at the NSA.

It’s sad but evil hacking geniuses still depend on dumb users. The odds of obsolete, unsupported, and unpatched software being able to fend off NSA hacks is low but it rapidly approaches zero when dimwitted dolts respond to [phishing attacks](#). How many “don’t click on unsolicited links” warnings must be issued before corporate cubicle warmers smarten up?

“But if I don’t click on this link I might miss consuming more useless crap?”

Finally, using Bitcoin for ransom purposes is unbelievably stupid.

WannaCry hackers you’re using the wrong [cryptocurrency](#)!

The Bitcoin blockchain is darn close to a perfect forensic tool. Once a transaction is recorded on the chain it can never be altered, erased, denied or fudged. You’re dropping indestructible breadcrumbs. It’s an audit trail on steroids. It’s like the idiot WannaCry hackers want to be caught!

Many feeble minds still think Bitcoin is anonymous. This was sort of true in the very early days of Bitcoin when nobody gave a shit about it and no serious money was changing hands. The world has changed. Bitcoin has been outperforming all fiat currencies for the last two years. A single coin is now worth more than the \$1,700 US – more than an ounce of gold. Serious money is now changing hands in the Bitcoin universe and when serious money is present the usual financial rapists and apex predators, your local taxation authorities, descend like vultures on a carcass.

Because the blockchain is immutable and open it's relatively easy to de-anonymize. An entire [software industry](#) has sprung up to do just this. Once you associate a person with a Bitcoin address you can easily and reliably follow the money. De-anonymizing Bitcoin has been going on for years. I just assume the entire blockchain is already de-anonymized which makes Bitcoin just about the worst possible choice for ransoms.

Despite all the amusing stupidity on display here, the WannaCry hack has inadvertently established a proper baseline test for an advanced privacy preserving cryptocurrency. *A proper private and secure cryptocurrency should be a nearly perfect money laundering tool!* I'm looking forward to the day when real evil geniuses, not WannaCry wannabes, stage a massive ransomware attack, collect a massive [buttload](#) of untraceable coin, and then spend it right under the noses of the word's taxation and intelligence agencies. When this glorious day arrives we, the little wage slaves, the deplorables, the lumpen-proletariat, will finally have some financial privacy! Remember, if your money isn't free then neither are you!

Until then I just WannaCry!

I Help Fat Little Kim Pick Nuke Targets

Posted: 13 Aug 2017 01:41:56

Guam?

Guam?

Kim, [you can't be serious!](#) I realize you live in a self-imposed hermit kingdom where questioning your fat headed notions results in [being thrown to actual dogs](#) but surely you're aware of *Baker's Law of American Cluelessness*.



No matter what the topic of conversation roughly one-third of the American public won't have a freaking clue what you're talking about.

I can assure you that an embarrassingly large percentage of Americans have no idea where, or what, Guam is and, even more disturbingly, even if they know it's an island somewhere in the Pacific they may think [it's in danger of tipping over](#) if too many people stand on one end.

Let's suppose you lose your mind, (I'm being sarcastic Kim), and nuke Guam. If we don't immediately destroy you can expect this from the American public.

1. Eco-morons and Green-twits will start worrying about nuclear fallout drifting ashore in California and write earnest ignorant Internet screeds about isotopes of Iodine. Kim, as a devoted Korean hater of all things Japanese, I'm sure you remember the great Japanese earthquake and tsunami of 2011. Isn't it great when nature kills your enemies for free? More than 15,000 Japanese citizens died and, oh yeah, the tsunami also wrecked a nuclear power plant: Fukushima. American eco-imbeciles quickly forgot about the earthquake and the thousands of dead bodies scattered by the tsunami and started worrying about [traces of Fukushima radiation](#) polluting their [pure bodily fluids](#). If you blow up Guam these idiots will ignore your glorious Guam body count and start agonizing about radioactive kale and the impact of fallout on the transgendered.
2. Old school American commies, (yes Kim we still have them and they're even more delusional than your commies), will look past your selecting Guam as a target, issuing orders to attack it, and them calmly murdering thousands of innocents and find some way to blame a white capitalist guy. *You see Kim, as a nonwhite Asian dude, you have no moral agency.* Even if you think you are making choices it's really just a reaction to what some white capitalist guy did to you, or your bat-shit crazy dad, or some distant ancestor, at some unspecified time in the past. *Nothing is ever your fault.* This is good news for professional western victims but kind of tarnishes your great Asian conqueror image. For western commies, there are no Asian Genghis Khan's.
3. Our uniformly imbecilic *fake-news-ers*, also known as the media, will finally have a topic worthy of 24/7 bloviating. They'll be thrilled that an atomic emergency might result in people watching them again. Of course, they'll quickly sabotage their transient relevance by staging talking-head-a-thons about "proportional responses" to being nuked. If a misunderstood adversary uses a forty kiloton nuke on your civilians is it a crime to retaliate with a megaton?
4. Finally, most of the American public will be deeply pissed. They'll cheer when a submarine pops a thermonuclear cap in your fat ass.

Kim nuking Guam is a big suicidal mistake. Don't get me wrong. I enjoy grand gestures and heroic deaths. Achilles didn't garner eternal glory by coming home from the Trojan War and growing olives. I know you're under pressure to live up to dear dead old dad and to dearer older deader granddad. I know you feel inadequate and will never be worthy of the aggrandizing bullshit you force feed your people. So let me help you by selecting nuke worthy American targets. Don't misconstrue my help. If you hit any of the following we will still exterminate you and your comrades.

Instead of Guam consider:

1. **Washington D.C:** I can't think of a more nuke worthy target. I know D.C. may be a long shot for your tiny-penis-ICBMs but if you can hit D.C. please have a whack. Trump's swamp draining hasn't been going very well. Maybe a swamp nuking would be more effective. The downside of nuking D.C. is that many Americans would secretly cheer it on. We'll appreciate the irradiated swamp but we'll still nuke you in return.
2. **Los Angeles, especially the Hollywood'ey bits:** Americans love their vacuous entertainments and the empty-headed narcissistic preening nitwits that make them. You can't imagine what a death-blow it would be to forego the next Marvel movie or another [ManBearPig](#) lecture. We'll miss the Hollywood Sign and the Griffith Observatory but eagerly look forward to next years [Dead Celebrity Roll](#) at the *relocated* Oscars. Oh, we'll still nuke your ass, even for Hollywood.
3. **Silicon Valley:** Recent [Goolag'ey events](#) have many Americans wondering if the hubris infused innovators of Silicon Valley have lost their mojo. Detonating nukes will take their powerful minds off disturbing notions of gender based intellectual differences and focus them on finding blast proof safe spaces. *Great minds need real problems.* Kim, about the only downside of nuking Silicon Valley, is that Facebook won't be able to tally your "Likes." It sucks to be radioactive rubble. Oh, and we still nuke you.
4. **Portland Oregon and Seattle Washington:** Oregon and Washington would be relatively sane states if these tumors were excised: just saying. Oh, we still nuke your ass.

Kim, you can't win but with judicious target selection, you can *make a difference*. As a wise shoe maker once said: "Just do it!"

Idaho Statesman Regurgitates High Precision Hate Calculations

Posted: 18 Aug 2017 01:53:53

The other day while eating lunch in my employer's cafeteria I picked up the fish wrap version of the *Idaho Statesman*. My employer kindly subscribes to the Statesman and scatters copies around the office so I don't have to spend my money on what is usually a slightly left of center, sane, and boring publication. The *Statesman* is constrained by the decidedly right of center leanings of Idaho but on some days they let their inner left-wing freak fly and boy did it fly when they boldly reported: [Idaho named the second-most hateful state in the U.S.](#)

I always thought we were number one!

I read the article to see who beat us in the prestigious hate rankings and would you believe Montana.

Montana?

My Spidey statistics sense started tingling. Was it my fault? In the last year I have lived in both Idaho and Montana, and being a hate group of one, *I hate the sloppy use of misleading statistics*, I may have skewed the rankings. Some co-workers remarked that if I only I had moved from Montana earlier Idaho would be number one.

Whenever I see overtly political opinions expressed with decimals I set my bullshit detectors [on eleven](#) and start analyzing the data, not the drivel.

Exactly how were these state hate rankings calculated? Here is how it's done.

1. The [South Poverty Law Center](#) (SPLC) has developed a precise scientific instrument that determines if arbitrary groups of people are a hate group. Compared to the SPLC hate group meter [LIGO's detection of gravity waves](#) is just trivial physics. In case you are wondering I am being sarcastic. There are no hate group meters! SPLC designations cannot be checked like the mass of the electron can be checked. They are merely expressing opinions about groups they don't like. However, for the sake of calculation, *let's assume SPLC hate group counts reflect some fundamental reality.*
2. State hate rankings are expressed as hate groups per million. For example, Idaho's ranking is 7.1/million. This value is computed by the simple formula.

$$(1000000 / StatePopulation) * (SPLCHateGroupCount)$$

Plugging in the SPLC values for Idaho we get:

$$(1000000 / 1695178) * 12 = 7.078902629$$

Which, when rounded up⁶⁴ to one decimal, equals 7.1; this matches the value reported by [24/7 Wall Street](#): the primary source cited by the *Statesman*.

I put together a little spreadsheet that applies this naive calculation to the ten most hateful states and it completely replicates the 24/7 hate ranking. The recalculated values are shown below and if you really must check my calculations you can download my spreadsheet [from here](#).

State	Population	HateGroups	PerMillionRatio	CalcHateFactor	RepHateFactor
Montana	1,052,343	10	0.950260514	9.502605139	9.6
Idaho	1,695,178	12	0.589908552	7.078902629	7.1
Mississippi	2,990,113	18	0.334435521	6.019839384	6
Tennessee	6,705,339	38	0.149134891	5.667125853	5.7
Alabama	4,884,115	27	0.204745384	5.528125362	5.6
Arkansas	3,000,942	16	0.3332287	5.331659192	5.4
Kentucky	4,450,042	23	0.22471698	5.168490545	5.2
Virginia	8,492,783	39	0.117747033	4.592134286	4.6
Missouri	6,123,362	24	0.16330898	3.919415511	3.9
Indiana	6,663,280	26	0.150076239	3.901982207	3.9

<http://worldpopulationreview.com/states/>

Now, for extra credit, what is wrong with this calculation? Remember, I am assuming SPLC's dubious and entirely subjective hate group counts are correct and I am using current state populations. So what is wrong? What renders this apparently precise analysis utterly meaningless, deceptive, and frankly so stupid that numerate adults should be embarrassed to parrot such nonsense in public.

If you haven't spotted the problem yet ask yourself. "How big are these hate groups?"

I come from Montana. It doesn't surprise me that Montana harbors ten "hate groups", but what does that mean? It probably means there are a few dozen nuts running around in fatigues kicking dogs and yelling at people to keep off their property. *You need to know how many people are in the "hate groups" to calculate a meaningful per capita statistic. Group hate is not a thing but individual hate is!*

⁶⁴The SPLC is a left-wing organization so they will round-up. White supremacists and other *wrong-thinkers* will round down.

I suspect the 24/7 authors and the *Statesman* know that ratio ranking is, to use a millennial word, “problematic”, but we all know the primary purpose of such facile reports (fake news) is to provide a seemingly credible reference that can be re-tweeted, and linked, *ad infinitum* by innumerate partisan dolts when they’re enjoying their five-minute social media hates.

Still Totally Awesome

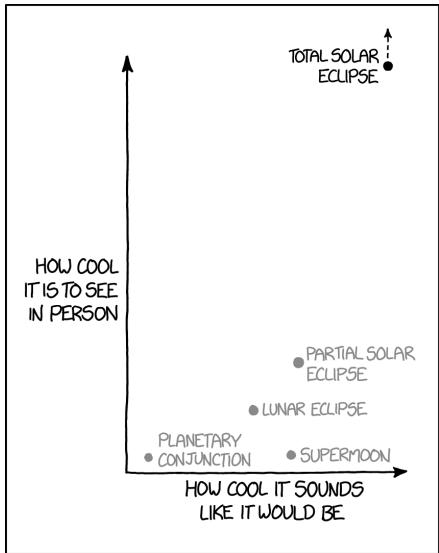
Posted: 27 Aug 2017 20:36:53

The total solar eclipse of August 21, 2017, was my fourth complete solar eclipse. I’ve seen two annular eclipses, 1994 and 2012, and two total eclipses, 2001 and 2017. Annular eclipses, or rings of fire, are worthy spectacles but nothing compares to a total solar eclipse. Some things have to be experienced to be fully appreciated. Unless you have stood under the Moon’s shadow you don’t really know what it’s like. Pictures and recordings all miss the mark. Maybe one day, when virtual reality directly hooks into all our senses, it may be possible to record totality but until then you have to get under the Moon’s shadow and, this is absolutely crucial, *only totality counts!*

Here in the Boise Idaho area, many people decided 99% was good enough. This is not even wrong! The August 21st eclipse took place right in the middle of Western Idaho State Fair and like all make a buck opportunists the fair promoted an “enjoy the eclipse with us event.” There was only one problem: Boise wasn’t in the totality zone so advertising dollars were spent reassuring fair-goers that 99% was close enough; that a measly 1% difference was no big deal; that it wasn’t worth refraining from shoveling junk food down your obese pie-hole on the overpriced midway. Cosmic spectacles cannot be allowed to suppress the bottom line.

Fortunately, I knew better. The difference between 99% and 100% is vast. Solar eclipse awesomeness is not linear! It’s actually more like a logarithmic step function with a really big step at totality. XKCD accurately summarized this his with recent eclipse cartoon. He correctly notes that total solar eclipses are off the scale.

There was no way I was going to miss totality, especially when it was almost in my backyard, so we got up at 4:00 am on the 21st and headed east to Mackay Idaho. I’d already driven around southern Idaho and Oregon scouting eclipse watching locations. My preferred location was on Sunset Peak in the Lost River mountain range of Idaho. Unfortunately, Sunset Peak required that we climb the mountain the night before, camp out near the summit, and then wait for the eclipse the next morning. It would



XKCD accurately notes that total solar eclipse “coolness” is off the scale. Totality is on an entirely different plane than partial or annular eclipses.

have been cool. Sunset Peak is slightly over 3,050 meters with nice views to the west and east. It would have been possible to watch the Moon’s shadow race over the Boise and Sawtooth mountains, blacking out one peak after another. I was all ready to pack up and go but my wife no longer camps out in tents. This is a problem I am still working on.

With the mountain summit vetoed we checked out the Snake River Valley near Huntington Oregon and Stanley Idaho. Both locations are very scenic but both required traversing easily congested roads. To ensure totality we would have had to go the night before. So we were right back to camping in tents. My third option Mackay Idaho was a nice mixture of, easily reached on good roads, large enough to find parking on public lands, and far enough out-of-the-way to avoid big crowds.

Mackay is about four hours from Meridian. To make it before first contact, shortly after 10:00 am local time, and to miss projected heavy traffic, we started at 4:00 am. In retrospect, we could have left later. Traffic was light on I84 and almost nonexistent on Idaho highway 20. We hardly saw another car until Highway 20 crossed the road to Sun Valley. Sun Valley was in the totality zone but it was too far from the center line for me. Leaving early paid off when we reached Craters of the Moon: a smoke reddened Sun was creeping over the eastern horizon and illuminating the black volcanic flows.

Turning north at Arco Idaho we headed north to Mackay. There was more smoke in the air than I would have liked. The further north we went the thicker the smoke



We left Meridian at 4:00 am and headed east to Mackay Idaho to see the eclipse. On the way we caught the Sun rising over the Craters of the Moon. It was a good start to eclipse day.



Getting ready for totality. This shot shows how much forest fire smoke was in the air. The mountains of the Lost River Range are almost completely obscured in the background. The smoke probably reduced our view of the corona at totality but it increased the darkness and helped cast a deep orange red 360-degree dusk.

got. When we reached Mackay you could smell the smoke. Mackay sits in a valley. Details on mountains to the east and west were obscured by smoke but the sky was completely clear of clouds and at totality the sun would be high overhead. I worried about smoke's impact on the corona but I cheered myself up with the thought that sunblock cream wouldn't be necessary.

Being two hours early Mali decided to nap in the car while I walked around Mackay taking pictures. Main Street was blocked off and street vendors were setting up tented stalls and big meat smokers. Others were busy selling souvenirs. Most of the stores were closed. The eclipse was a good excuse for a holiday. I waited in a donut line and chatted with other eclipse tourists. One Maryland couple had just arrived in a rented car from Salt Lake City. A few Italians had come all the way from Naples. I saw lots of Utah, California, Alberta and Nevada license plates. Total solar eclipses gather the multitudes.

After checking out downtown Mackay I drifted back to the Centennial Rest Stop where Spanish science students were setting up equipment to observe the eclipse.



Mackay blocked off Main Street for anticipated eclipse crowds. The number of people that showed up underwhelmed. The only eclipse complaints I am aware of were made by businesses hoping to cash in on massive crowds. Crowds were down over the entire country. Too many people were scared away by horror stories about traffic and the rest bought the malarkey that 99% coverage is close enough to 100%. Eclipses are not tests. That last 1% obscures a vast unfathomable difference.

They had come all the way from Spain to watch the eclipse in tiny Mackay Idaho. The moon's shadow turns even the most unlikely places into tourist attractions. The scientific utility of total solar eclipses in the 21st century is not what it used to be but eclipses do offer great excuses for globe trekking and the re-enactment of historical experiments. The Spaniards were busy preparing weather balloons and getting ready to photograph the corona. They were also making objective lens solar filters for people who brought binoculars and telephoto lens. I considered having some made for my 16x70 astronomical binoculars but decided against it. Instead, I went back to our car, woke up Mali, and then started hauling eclipsing paraphernalia to the viewing area. Unlike many present, we didn't have a lot of gear: just binoculars, three-legged folding stools, cell phones, cameras, and eclipse shades. Shortly after setting up our stools the Spanish students started counting down to first contact. Shortly after 10:00 am the eclipse started.

At first, people were excited to see the Moon slowly nibble at the Sun's disk but they quickly quieted down. I got the impression that many were questioning the so-called awesomeness of solar eclipses. It's just a boring black cookie-bite Sun. What's the big deal? I think many were also surprised by how long it took for the Moon to cover the sun. I'd seen this phase before so I wandered around the crowd taking pictures while the Moon slowly covered the sun.

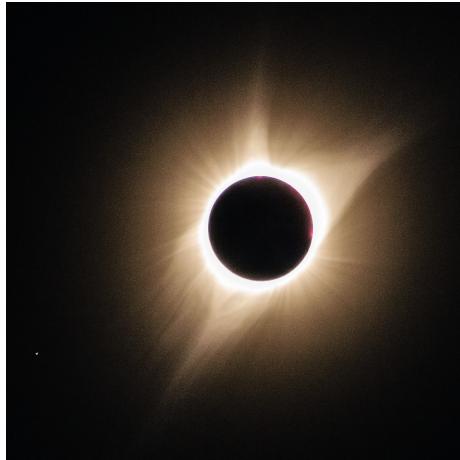
Fifteen minutes before totality the changing light was getting hard to ignore. The



A group of science students came all the way from Spain to watch the eclipse in Mackay Idaho. They brought a collection of telescopes, sun filters, and weather balloons. They released a balloon just before the eclipse, presumably to measure the eclipse induced temperature drop which was considerable. Mackay's elevation is almost 1800 meters. When the Sun goes down the temperature drops. The wind was blowing from the north and their balloon took off towards the south. They probably had a little road trip to recover it.

human eye adapts logarithmically to changing light levels. At this point in the eclipse more than 90% of the sun was covered, dropping light levels by a factor of ten, but it was only in the last five minutes that it became obvious that it was getting dark. I spotted a flock of pigeons gathering on the fences nearby. They were disturbed by the change in routine. As totality approached people started counting down. I peeled off my eclipse shades and glanced directly at the waning light. As the sun squeezed down to a pinhole of brilliant light I saw dazzling rainbow halos around the sun. I'm developing cataracts. When I stare into bright point sources I see rainbow halos. I had never looked at a point source as bright as the Sun and the effect was both beautiful and alarming. I will have to do something about my cataracts in a few years.

At totality, the blasé crowd erupted. Many started squealing, pointing, and yelling. Mali pointed to a flock of pigeons, the same flock I had spotted on the fence before, tearing through the air. I briefly looked all around to see the 360-degree sunset. I was expecting a deep orange dusk all around up but it failed to appear. We were too close to the mountains. Then I pointed my 16x70 binoculars at the eclipsed sun. Three flares were visible and the corona's filaments were as beautiful as ever. The corona was not as extensive as the 2001 eclipse and the core region near the sun seemed brighter. I looked around for planets and stars. Venus was easy. I was expecting to spot Mercury and Mars but I the only star I saw near the Sun I later identified as Regulus. I didn't try to photograph my first total solar eclipse but near the end of



I didn't try and photograph my first total solar eclipse but this time I fired off a few 300mm handheld telephoto shots just to see what might come up. The result was better than I expected.

totality I grabbed my DSLR and fired off a few 300mm telephoto shots just to see what might come up.

Then, as suddenly as it started, the Sun burst forth. One bystander yelled, “Do it again!” The small crowd kept buzzing as more of the Sun was exposed. The consensus was, “Yeah, total solar eclipses are freaking awesome and totality is totally worth seeing.” Later, while standing in line to view the Sun and receding Moon through a Hydrogen Alpha filtered telescope, I overheard a fellow in the crowd say, “I’d read about shadow chasers, people who go all over the world to see total eclipses, I thought that was crazy, until today!”

The next total solar eclipse is in 2019. The greatest eclipse is in the Pacific, later the shadow runs over parts of Chile and Argentina. I’ve always wanted to visit the large observatories in Chile and view the southern sky from the super dark high elevation skies of the Atacama. This with totality is close to amateur astronomer heaven.

Stop Writing Dead Tree Letters to the Editor

Posted: 13 Sep 2017 18:21:01

I don’t pay for newspapers anymore and neither should you. The dead tree media is truly and absolutely dead. It serves no function in the modern world and like the [What Happened Hildabeast](#), it needs to FOAD. The collapse of print media and the incontinent wailing of unemployed [political operatives with bylines](#) has been duly noted by many and, as much as I love flogging dead horses, that is not why I *blogforth* today. There is one anachronistic section of dead tree newspapers that still amuses

me: letters to the editor.

Who the hell writes letters to the editor these days?

Did these letter writers just wake from a long Rip Van Winkle nap and take up where they left off in the 1960s? Oh, and it definitely is the 1960s. The overwhelming majority of dead tree letters clearly come from the fat furrowed brows of retired old boomer farts that mistake constipation for thought.

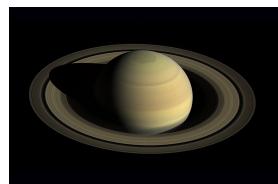
As I have said before, even though I am a boomer, nobody hates them more than me.

There's no point in rehashing the infinitely rehashed. Modern letters to the editor lack the intelligence of blog posts, the pithiness of tweets, the sublimity of poetry or the seriousness of books. They're vain displays. Look at me; I've bamboozled an idiot newspaper editor. Congratulations, you've surmounted a bar low enough for Conga champions.

I think I speak for all of us when I say that we've had enough of your letter antics. Please find your way to the nearest online comments section and unleash your inner troll. And, if you must debase yourself to a larger audience *start a blog!*

Don't be a Weenie Launch Cassini

Posted: 15 Sep 2017 17:27:15



Future generations will remember Bill Clinton for two things, not having sex with that woman and authorizing the launch of Cassini. I was working in Dallas Texas in the months before Cassini's launch. It was 1997 and the Internet was just beginning to disrupt everyday life. Google was morphing from a thesis to a company and abominations like Facebook, Twitter and smartphones were years away. It was a time of CD-ROM games, 56K dial-up modems, bulletin boards, hand crafted HTML websites, and Netscape Navigator. Even in its primitive state the Internet already exhibited many of the things I value and detest about it today. Two events made this abundantly clear. The inane shenanigans that preceded Cassini's launch and the death of Carl Sagan.

I had a few beefs with Sagan. Like all science popularizers he often dumbed things down to misleading levels and, like most *western* academics, he was naive about vicious authoritarian regimes. In Sagan's mind, a handful of exemplary Soviet scientists went a long way toward excusing the Gulag and purges. I overlooked his good-natured

naivety. It was, and still is, a common delusion. Many intelligent people fall victim to the belief that their superior accomplishments endow them with universal wisdom. This is pure classic hubris.

Sagan had flaws but he was also the real scientific deal. He predicted the surface temperature of Venus before it was measured and contributed both scientifically and politically to the success of some of the 20th century's most spectacular space missions like the Martian Viking landers and the epic Voyagers. Even his popular stunts like the [Pioneer plaque](#) and the [Voyager gold records](#) were classy and compelling. For me, Sagan's most enduring quality was his very public and relentless refusal to buy into irrational bullshit. He rhetorically dismembered idiots that saw faces on Mars and skies full of alien bearing UFOs. The Martian face turned out to an [eroded mesa](#), just like Sagan said it was, and we are still waiting for genuine rigorously authenticated evidence of real UFOs. Sagan's often said, "Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence!" It's a maxim I apply every single day and you should too.

The day Sagan died I connected to the Internet with my trusty 56K dial-up modem. I was looking for unofficial Sagan obituaries and boy did I find them. It turns out that UFO cultists did not appreciate Sagan's precise and correct analysis of their unsubstantiated nonsense. Clearly, he was part of the vast centuries old global cover-up. Everyone knows that the Illuminati, the Masons, the Rothschilds, the Jews, and the Jewish aliens in the UFOs, are suppressing UFO evidence: presumably to facilitate draining our precious bodily fluids. *I exaggerate but not by much!* It was my first encounter with unhinged Internet trolls. My already low opinion of the people's intelligence dipped lower. Of course, trolls come in all flavors. There are good trolls, the ones I agree with, and evil trolls, the ones I disagree with. Overall, a free Internet with hate mongering vicious trolls is vastly better than a censored Internet that's been reduced to a giant empty echoing, ruling-class-approved, safe space. "Sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt me."

No matter what you think of the boorish behavior of UFO cultists celebrating Sagan's death it's clear to all, including the UFO cultists themselves that they are, in Douglass Adam's exquisite words, "mostly harmless." No one gives a crap what ufologists (yeah it's a word) think and nobody will pay attention to their ravings until they meet well-defined standards of proof. Sorry guys it's a skeptic's world and we won't be lowering standards of scientific validation for you.

Unfortunately, anti-nuclear don't launch Cassini, nitwits almost aborted what turned out to be an undisputed marvel of our age. I remember these 1997 loons and until

they crawl out from their troglodyte caves, prostrate themselves before the great and powerful Internet, and publicly admit that they were completely wrong about Cassini, that launching the probe was the right thing to do, and that some tiny risks are very much worth taking, I will forever curse, mock, belittle, and remind others of their appalling judgment and sniveling cowardice.

The Cassini launch hysterics began when a pack of dolts noticed the word “Plutonium” in Cassini’s press material. Plutonium, oh my god! What are those privileged white devils in JPL up to? The JPL white devils tried to explain how [RTG generators](#) work and that a safe reliable compact long-lasting power source was required for operations at Saturn where sunlight is around 0.011 Earth’s intensity but math is hard. Way too hard for ideologues triggered by visions of Plutonium saturated Challenger like explosions spreading deadly radiation over a wide area. It was all over hyped rubbish. As of 2017, it’s not clear that RTGs have killed a single person in over fifty years of use let alone the tens of thousands the Cassini Cassandras were picturing. The white devils lost patience and did a little back of the envelope calculation that assumed a major Cassini crash that uniformly spread the probe’s “deadly Plutonium” over the entire Earth. Given this absurd worst case scenario, how many excessive cancer deaths could we expect? The calculation [estimated about 5,000](#) spread over a lifetime: *not enough to worry about!* Michio Kaku called bullshit on this absurd scenario and quickly concocted his own absurd scenario that had Cassini crashing into a dense urban area with laser guided bomb casualty maximizing effectiveness. This bumped the dark wet dream body count to 200,000. Both calculations were ridiculous. This entire episode is neatly summarized in this [Mother Jones](#) (can you believe it) article.

The launch of Cassini and its Earth flyby imposed minuscule risks. Even if things went horribly, *but realistically wrong*, it’s unlikely the probe would have killed more than a thousand people. Whenever I hear projected death tolls I convert the statistic into one I care about. *What are my chances of dying?* The Earth’s population was roughly six billion in 1997. The chances of Cassini killing me was at most one in million and probably much less. What type of whiny cowardly snowflake would give up the glories of Cassini for one in million odds of something bad happening? I would have accepted much worse odds.

I wasn’t the only one willing to take an infinitesimal risk to advance human knowledge. Just before Cassini’s launch the anti-Cassini mob planned a march in Washington to screech, wave banners, and go full incontinent leftist ape. In their bush baby brains Cassini had to be stopped. Before 1997 protesters rarely faced counter protesters but Cassini touched a deep nerdy nerve and [a small band of](#) pro-Cassini protesters showed up shouting “Don’t be a weenie, launch Cassini,” and like the Greeks at Marathon,

they drove the stunted grunting anti-Cassini beasts from the rhetorical field. I like to imagine the “don’t be a weenie, launch Cassini” ruckus stirred Bill to take a break from dipping cigars in intern vaginas and get on the phone to authorize Cassini’s launch.

Today the pro-Cassini protesters would be erroneously described as “alt-right.” *Actually, they were simply and absolutely right* as hundreds of thousands of stunning Cassini images, thousands of scientific papers, and dozens of unexpected discoveries about Saturn and its Moons attest. Cassini exceeded everybody’s expectations. The Voyagers were the greatest space probes of the 20th century and Cassini is the greatest of the 21st so far. If we’re lucky we’ll see Cassini surpassed and that is something to look forward to.

EquiFucked

Posted: 26 Sep 2017 22:41:45

If you have the misfortune of dealing with US Fuckancial orifice Insertions (Financial Institutions) you’ve probably heard of the [Equifax hack](#). Equifax is one of three large companies in the US that collect, without your explicit approval, personal credit information to compute credit scores. Your credit score is a single number that *allegedly* measures how likely you are to pay back loans. Credit scores are no longer used just for assessing creditworthiness. They’ve slowly become proxies for literacy, intelligence, and honesty. In today’s USA, it is illegal in many states to test a job applicant’s literacy or IQ. In others, you cannot ask if they have a criminal record. Fortunately, for HR drones everywhere, there are no laws barring credit score enquiries. Oh sure, you can refuse to allow a potential employer to look up your score but if you want the damn job you’re more or less forced to bend over and enjoy a scoring.

EQUIFUCKED

I first met credit scores in the 1990s. After two decades of living in Canada, I returned to the US for a job. In the early 1990s few companies requested credit scores on job applications but if you tried to rent an apartment the first thing they asked for was a credit score. I didn’t have one at the time and this turned out to be a major problem. I calmly explained that I had lived outside the US for my entire working life and had never taken out a US loan, used a US credit card, or secured US credit of any form. I was an alien freak, possibly dangerous, and certainly, someone to be wary of.

My situation wasn't unique. In the 1990s large numbers of American immigrants, both legal and illegal didn't have credit scores but, how can I delicately phrase this, their predominantly dusky hues forestalled aggressive credit score seeking by lawsuit averse bottom feeders. My hue didn't help. My status as an educated, articulate, white guy without a credit score was an unfathomable anomaly to the simpletons that process apartment applications. I eventually straightened this out but I had to get a letter from my employer that disclosed my salary and, even then, the simpletons had to phone my employer's HR department to make sure I wasn't trying to soil a sacred one bedroom dump with my unscored person. The entire episode pissed me off.

Who allowed large, [clearly inept](#), credit agencies to collect detailed personal information on pretty much every person in the US? Even worse, what bit of arcane intellectual property law, gives credit agencies the right to apply, "proprietary" - meaning opaque undisclosed bullshit - algorithms to their pilfered information to compute an index that nobody outside the agencies can vet for accuracy or relevance? Finally, who continues to tolerate their criminally negligent handling of sensitive data? I would be willing to bet big bucks that the EquiFucks didn't even encrypt the data that was hacked. I work with corporate databases and you would be surprised at how often things like Social Security Numbers are stored in plaintext. Meaning any disgruntled ITer, and there are a lot of bitter disgruntled ITers, could easily replicate the Equifax hack.

The EquiFucks know they are in deep dodo. [Three company executives](#) conveniently unloaded company stock after discovering, *but before disclosing* the hack, and today [the CEO "voluntarily retired."](#) I know it looks like they're pulling the ripcords on their golden parachutes but I'm sure it's all as innocent and kosher as unleavened bread. The EquiFuck is so bad that the traditional stern admonishment to never do it again followed by sizeable donations to political accomplices probably won't cut it this time. I better see some perps in prison.

Sending EquiFucks to prison, while gratifying – their agony will be delicious – won't fix the real problem which is the collection of immutable identifiers like Social Security Numbers. I've [raged about the idiocy of Social Security Numbers before](#) and until we move to a proper private and public key based identification system EquiFucks will just keep happening. I could care less if the EquiFucks of the world store my public key. Without my private key, which I, and only I know, it cannot be used to find shit. Of course, this will destroy the business model of financial predators like credit score companies but, paraphrasing Mao, you've got a break a few eggs now and then.

The Mass Kill as Performance Art

Posted: 08 Oct 2017 20:50:08

It's been almost a week since the Las Vegas Mandalay Bay massacre and the idiot media is still looking for "a motive." They remind me of O.J.'s fruitless search for the "real killer." I don't watch the alphabets, except when trapped in airports or, with increasing annoyance, in my employer's cafeteria so I've missed days of mindless speculation but my limited TV sampling confirms what's easily gleaned from more efficient news sources. The killers "motive" is still unknown and the authorities are still looking.

In all the blather about the mysterious highly organized and thoughtful killer, it's never occurred to anyone (on TV anyway), that the lack of an apparent motive is exactly what the killer hoped to achieve.

Consider the usual mass media slaughter script. An individual, or group of individuals, attack and murder a sufficiently⁶⁵ large number of "innocents."

If, as is often the case, the attackers are well-known terrorists they will typically gloat and issue more threats. Public threats trigger the idiot media's "analysis."

If the terrorists are Jihadis the idiot media will downplay the attack while issuing stern warnings about not jumping to racist conclusions about an "entire religion." Then, when forced by competing news organizations like Fox or right-leaning bloggers, they will join the fray and condemn the killers while searching for a way to blame Trump.

If the killer is black and the victims are black — well this isn't news! Press the ignore button and complain about anything that can be plausibly blamed on Trump. And, fortunately for the idiot media, that well will never run dry.

If the killer is white and the victims are *mostly white* (bingo for Las Vegas), spend a day or two glorifying the murderer. Review his⁶⁶ typically pathetic and meaningless life while running candlelight vigils, peace garden plantings, and out-of-tune *Kumbaya-a-thons* in the background. In more sober moments touch on the "known motive" for the mayhem. Tut-tut the violence, reassure moronic viewers that violence is never the answer. Play a few bars of *Imagine* then, when appropriate mourning turns to anger, use the "known motive" to pivot to what the idiot media wanted to talk about

⁶⁵Sufficiently large is an ever-increasing natural number that is now greater than ten.

⁶⁶The overwhelming majority of mass killers are male.

from the beginning: *gun confiscation*.⁶⁷

The sooner the idiot media can get “the motive” out of the way the sooner they can get down to one of their favorite topics. Sadly, the Vegas killer, being an intelligent and detail oriented psychopath, anticipated this and left no clear motive forcing the idiot media to fixate, like a dog licking its ass, on “the motive” for day, after day, after day. Every day spent discussing “the motive” inflates the killer’s infamy. He’s already the most famous mass killer in recent history.

Real villainy requires incomprehensible dread and clear motives eliminate dread. When Jihadis kill it’s no big deal. Their sky fairy manual exhorts true believers to behead, enslave and tax infidels. It’s hard to imagine a violence-free way to realize such goals. When black hating psychopaths open fire in churches the idiot media have ready-made dread dispelling explanations. If you can quickly explain an atrocity it almost ceases being atrocious. But, if the horror can never be explained, if it sticks in your existential craw, it remains a source of terror forever. This is what the killer was really aiming for.

I view the Las Vegas massacre as deadly performance art. The killer has more in common with “artists” that drop their pants in public and pee on crucifixes than cause-driven revolutionaries or garden variety psychopaths. What exactly motivates public “performance” crucifix urination? To even ask the question is to mock it. For one deadly night the Vegas killer staged a performance that upstaged all the other Vegas shows and unlike another showing of *Cirque du Soleil* or *Menopause the Musical* his performance will be remembered forever. *The mass kill is a new art form and the idiot media is its biggest patron.*

Review: The Way We Die Now

Posted: 18 Nov 2017 18:11:53

The Way We Die Now is not the best book I’ve read this year but it may be the

⁶⁷It’s impossible to have an intelligent debate about guns in the US is because neither side is willing to discuss their ultimate goals or take responsibility for their positions. Gun controllers secretly want the second amendment appealed and all existing guns confiscated. Nothing else will satisfy them. They naively think an unarmed society will never be abused by the state. Gun holders often point out that the second amendment was never about creating a safe and secure society but about erecting deadly barriers to government tyranny. Unfortunately, they’re unwilling to admit that a heavily armed populace will result in large numbers of firearm deaths. US gun deaths are an order of magnitude greater than comparable western societies: that tree of liberty is more bloodthirsty than expected.

most important. In Seamus O'Mahony's opinion, modern society has forgotten how to deal with death. There are many reasons for this, the collapse of religious belief, the demolition of the extended family, the triumph of the scientific and rational worldview, even our delusions of curing death "real soon now" contribute to our collective denial. Yet death persists. Death remains absolute, sovereign, implacable, terrifying, "majestic and cruel." Even if we realize our *singularity fantasies* and greatly extend life death will never be banished. Even the gods die! We must face death, but must we turn it into a carnival of "medical excess?"

I have seen medical excess. My mother was diagnosed with Stage IV Glioblastoma: a form of brain cancer that is so deadly it's been nicknamed the terminator. Actually, the terminator is flattered by the comparison. Some survived their encounter with fictional terminators. Nobody survives stage IV Glioblastoma: "there is no stage V." When I heard mom's diagnosis I looked for actuarial survival statistics. Credible statistics for common fatal diseases are harder to track down than you might expect. I eventually found a paper that cast survival times in a useful form. Median survival was less than three months for younger and healthier patients than my mother. She died about two months after her diagnosis - right on statistical schedule. The universe does not make personal exemptions.

Her death was inevitable, but the expensive, futile, painful and isolating medical gauntlet she endured was not. She just wanted to go home, perhaps to "turn her head to the wall," perhaps to binge on *The Big Bang Theory* - she still enjoyed a few silly shows. It doesn't matter what the dying choose to do with their remaining hours, but it sure as hell matters that we honor their choices and the *Way We Die Now* makes a compelling case that we are failing "to be brave." I know I acquiesced to the *medial default* for my mother; I still feel I should have fought harder for *what she wanted*.

According to O'Mahony, the *medical default is full intervention* even when it's pointless and wasteful. He also notes that doctors are in a no-win situation. If they suggest doing nothing they're accused of euthanizing patients. If they go full interventionist Rambo they're inflicting needless suffering and profiting from the dying. Both extremes often end up in court, as if we could fix death with more litigation. Obviously, something in the middle is the best course and O'Mahony argues that doctors should not set the middle course.

Our infantile society needs to grow up and face death like adults. Nothing makes our magical thinking about death clearer than Somerset Maugham's⁶⁸ observations

⁶⁸The Way We Die Now relates many stories about "celebrity" deaths.

about a “dog’s death.” Maugham hoped he was lucky enough to die a dog’s death! A dog’s death is meant to be a horrible thing but is it really worse than human medical excess? When it comes to sick animals we are clear-headed and compassionate. We don’t subject them to futile treatments, we make them comfortable and take away their pain. I once had a cat that came down with pancreatitis. She wasted away on the top of our fridge until one day we took her to the vet. Her death was calm and without terror. My cat had a better death than my mother. I suspect many pets die with greater dignity than their owners. This is fundamentally wrong and we all know it.

There are no easy answers; it sucks to be mortal. We can’t say until we face it ourselves how we should die so how can we dictate to others? I only hope that when my time comes I have it within me to follow the one bit of advice O’Mahony offers that may apply to all us – “be brave.”

Downloading SmugMug Captions with Python and Jupyter

Posted: 24 Dec 2017 20:38:48

This blog post started out as an experimental rendering of a [Jupyter notebook](#). I wanted to see how difficult it would be to convert a notebook to a WordPress.com blog post. Even though Jupyter exports notebooks in HTML and Markdown they do not display well “out of the box.” No doubt one could craft CSS that would help but the entire point of Jupyter exports is to cut down on pointless format thrashing. This post is a teaser. If you want to get to the source notebook follow [this link to my GitHub repositories](#).

Why am I doing this?

My [photo captions](#) have evolved into a form of *milliblogging*. *Milliposts* (milliblog posts) are terse and tiny; many are single sentences or paragraphs. Taken one-at-a-time milliposts seldom impress but when gathered in hundreds or thousands accidental epics emerge. So, to prevent “epic loss” I want a simple way of downloading and archiving my captions off-line.



If you don’t control it you cannot trust it!

When I started blogging I knew that you could not depend on blogging websites to archive and preserve your documents. We had already seen cases of websites mangling

content, shutting down without warning, and even worse, *censoring* bloggers. It was a classic case of, “If you don’t control it you cannot trust it.” I resolved to keep complete off-line *version controlled* copies of my blog posts.

Maintaining off-line copies was made easier by [WordPress.com’s excellent blog export utility](#). A simple button push downloads a large XML file that has all your blog posts with embedded references to images and other inclusions. XML is not my preferred archive format. I am a huge fan of LaTeX and Markdown: two text formats that are directly supported in Jupyter Notebooks. I wrote a little system that parses the WordPress XML file and [generates LaTeX and Markdown files](#). Yet, despite milliblogging long before blogging, I don’t have a similar system for downloading and archiving SmugMug *metadata*. [This Jupyter notebook addresses this omission](#) and shows how you can use Python and the SmugMug API to extract gallery and image metadata and store it in version controlled local directories as CSV files.

Dear Apple Pay Stop Harassing Me!

Posted: 26 Dec 2017 18:00:41

Dear Apple Pay stop harassing me! I will never sign up for you and no amount of iOS app-nagging will change that. You’re pathetic interruptions merely remind me why I “resist” installing every freaking iOS upgrade the Apple mothership foists on its hapless phone users.

I use an iPhone⁶⁹ but I am not a member of the bleating iSheep. I’ve slowly, one unwanted upgrade after another, developed an intense loathing of Apple’s holier than thou, we know what’s best for the iIdiots, attitude. You’re beginning to remind me of the Hildabeast. Remember that foul creature and her well-deserved fate!

Loathing aside, I have a perfectly logical reason for refusing Apple Pay. Unlike the bleating iSheep, I see what you are trying to do. You want to become a financial “middleman.” You want to skim an ever-increasing percentage of every transaction your well-trained herd of iSheep makes. I admire your larcenous spirit but if you haven’t noticed, we have enough parasitic financial rent-seeking middlemen on this insane planet. Part of the allure and promise of cryptocurrencies is that they show a way to rid the universe of skimming scum like central banks, government fiat, rapacious money transmitters, exchange controls and abominations like Apple Pay.

⁶⁹Unless there are big changes at Apple this is my last iPhone. I want a device that I absolutely control. “If you don’t control it you cannot trust it.” Any phone that I cannot even be sure is off does not qualify. Burners may be my only option.

Don't ever darken my day with another "activate Apple Pay now" message again.
You have been warned!

2018

Government Shutdown and Rapture 2018

Posted: 21 Jan 2018 21:43:58

It's 2018. 2018 has prime factors of 2 and 1009, e.g. $2018 = 2 \times 1009$.

Did anything happen in the years 2 and 1009?

1. In the year 2 Venus and Jupiter were in conjunction. Some speculate this may have been the "Star of Bethlehem."
2. In 1009 the Church of Holy Sepulcher was destroyed.

How odd, the prime factors of 2018 yield two Jesus related events, separated by over a thousand years that are mysteriously tied to his birthplace. Evidently, the Star of Bethlehem marked the beginning, 1009 marked the middle, and 2018 is the end! *Repent, the rapture is upon us!* Better buckle up non-gender specific bovine control officers (cowboys) 2018 is going to be rough.

Just how rough you ask? Imagine hordes of underachieving and mostly useless bureaucrats forced to take an impromptu paid holiday⁷⁰ because even more useless legislators cannot agree on how to spend other people's money. Let's hope the government stays shutdown down until the imminent rapture renders it redundant.

My calculations cannot pinpoint the exact time and date of the rapture. My guess would be the first⁷¹ blood moon of the year, January 31, 2018. Get your affairs in order and divest yourself of your worldly bitcoins.⁷² Use the address encoded in the QR graphic of this blog.

Hey: If you think this micro-epiphany is batshit crazy take a look at this! It's getting to the point where it's no longer possible to be satirical because somewhere on the intertubes you'll find true believers that go way beyond satire.

⁷⁰None of the furiously furloughed will miss a single damn paycheck. Where can I get a job that pays me to sit on my ass and whine about whatever the idiot talking point of the day is?

⁷¹2018 has two total lunar eclipses. If we're not raptured on January 31st wait until July 27th

⁷²Sky Fairy consultants, also known as prophets, have high overhead and need substantial donations to maintain their close connections with the divine.

Setting SmugMug Print Size Keywords with Jupyter and Python

Posted: 28 Jan 2018 07:27:10

For the last few weeks, my normal hobbies have been preempted by my obsessive *refactoring* of an old SmugMug keyword setting program. Many years ago I wrote a small application that helped me maintain meaningful SmugMug keywords. I used this application for years until inevitable software changes broke it. Replacing it with something better has been on my to-do list for ages.

I kept putting it off because I knew the tools I used in the past, mostly J and VB, were not well suited to REST API programming. Yes, I know just about any programming tool can be forced to serve, Turning completeness guarantees it, but I have grown weary of programming to prove tiresome points. If a tool makes something more difficult or tedious than it should be then change tools!

The downside of changing tools is that it usually results in learning yet another programming language. I always try to avoid this! I briefly considered languages with decent REST support that I already *sort-of-know*⁷³, C#, JavaScript, VB.Net and decided that proper 64 bit versions were either too expensive (C#, VB.Net) or that I didn't want to stare at ugly bracket infested syntax for weeks. I'm talking about you JavaScript. Even your fanboys admit that you're an ugly duckling.

I eventually decided to go with Python. I've always found Python code more readable than many other programming languages. This is a widespread opinion. Python is free, open source, and comes with a large diverse set of tools. One of the best tools to come out of the Python world is Jupyter. [Jupyter](#) is the first public domain open source [literate programming](#) tool that has gained a large following.

I've been a fan of literate programming ever since I read [Knuth's seminal book](#). He used the technique to create some of the [best program documentation ever created](#). I always wondered why literate programming never caught on. I suspected the basic problem was simply that many programmers are not particularly literate. Well, Jupyter is proving me wrong.

⁷³Be highly suspicious of people who claim to fully understand any programming language. Only delusional nitwits would make such a claim for any natural language. Does anybody, even luminaries like Shakespeare, truly understand English? We all *sort-of-know* our mother tongues and if we're honest, we're continually surprised by how others make use of it. *Literature, it's a thing*. The same holds for programming languages. Every day I'm surprised, by unusual, stupid, silly, clever and freaking brilliant code fragments in programming languages that I have used for decades.

Jupyter is certainly helping me write and program with such clarity that all my ideas seem trivial.

Compare this notebook, (use the first link for the best layout), to my [earlier blog post](#) about setting SmugMug print size keywords.

1. [Nbviewer: Setting SmugMug Print Size Keywords with Jupyter and Python](#)
2. [GitHub: Setting SmugMug Print Size Keywords with Jupyter and Python](#)

NumPy another Iverson Ghost

Posted: 31 Mar 2018 21:07:53



During my recent [SmugMug API and Python](#) adventures I was haunted by an Iverson ghost: NumPy

An Iverson ghost is an embedding of APL like array programming features in nonAPL languages and tools.

You would be surprised at how often Iverson ghosts appear. Whenever programmers are challenged with processing large numeric arrays they rediscover bits of APL. Often they're unaware of the rich heritage of array processing languages but in NumPy's case, they *indirectly* acknowledged the debt. In [Numerical Python](#) the authors wrote:

The languages which were used to guide the development of NumPy include the infamous APL family of languages, Basis, MATLAB, FORTRAN, S and S+, and others.

I consider “infamous” an upgrade from “a mistake carried through to perfection.”

Not only do developers frequently conjure up Iverson ghosts, they also invariably turn into little apostles of array programming that won’t shut up about how cutting down on all those goddamn loops clarifies and simplifies algorithms. How learning to think about operating on entire arrays, versus one dinky number at a time, frees the mind. Why it’s almost as if array programming is a tool of thought.

Where have I heard this before?

Ahh, I’ve got it, when I first encountered APL almost fifty years ago.

Yes, I am an old programmer, a fossil, a living relic. My brain is a putrid pool of punky programming languages. Python is just the latest in a longish line of languages. Some people collect stamps. I collect programming languages. And, just like stamp collectors have favorite stamps, I find some programming languages more attractive than others. For example, I recognize the undeniable utility of `C/C++`, for many tasks they are the only serious options, yet as useful and pervasive as `C/C++` are they have never tickled my fancy. The notation is ugly! Yeah, I said it; suck on it C people. Similarly, the world's most commonly used programming language `JavaScript` is equally ugly. Again, `JavaScript` is so damn useful that programmers put up with its many warts. Some have even made a few bucks writing books about its [meager good parts](#).

I have similar inflammatory opinions about other widely used languages. The one that is making me miserable now is `SQL`, particularly Microsoft's variant `T-SQL`. On purely aesthetic grounds I find well-formed `SQL` queries less appalling than your average `C` pointer fest. Core `SQL` is fairly elegant but the macro programming features that have grown up around it are depraved. I feel dirty when forced to use them which is just about every other day.

At the end of my programming day, I want to look on something that is beautiful. I don't particularly care about how useful a chunk of code is or how much money it might make, or what silly little business problem it solves. If the damn code is ugly I don't want to see it.

People keep rediscovering array programming, best described in Ken Iverson's 1962 book [*A Programming Language*](#), for two basic reasons:

1. It's an efficient way to handle an important class of problems.
2. It's a step away from the ugly and back towards the beautiful.

Both of these reasons manifest in `NumPy`'s resounding success in the Python world.

As usual, efficiency led the way. The authors of *Numerical Python* note:

Why are these extensions needed? The core reason is a very prosaic one, and that is that manipulating a set of a million numbers in Python with the standard data structures such as lists, tuples or classes is much too slow and uses too much space.

Faced with a “[does not compute](#)” situation you can either try something else or fix what you have. The Python people fixed Python with `NumPy`. [Pythonistas](#) reluctantly embraced `NumPy` but quickly went *apostolic!* Now books like [*Elegant SciPy*](#) and the

entire `SciPy` toolset that been built on `NumPy` take it for granted.

Is there anything in `NumPy` for programmers that have been drinking the array processing cool aid for decades? The answer is yes! [J programmers](#), in particular, are in for a treat with the new Python3 addon that's been released with the latest J 8.07 beta. This addon directly supports `NumPy` arrays making it easy to swap data in and out of the J/Python environments. It's one of those best of both worlds things.

The following `NumPy` examples are from the [SciPy.org NumPy quick start tutorial](#). For each `NumPy` statement, I have provided a J equivalent. J is a descendant of APL. It was largely designed by the same man: Ken Iverson. A scumbag lawyer or greedy patent troll might consider suing `NumPy`'s creators after looking at these examples. APL's influence is obvious. Fortunately, Ken Iverson was more interested in promoting good ideas than profiting from them. I suspect he would be flattered that APL has mutated and colonized strange new worlds and I think even zealous Pythonistas will agree that Python is a delightfully strange world.

Some `Numpy` and J examples

Selected Examples from <https://docs.scipy.org/doc/numpy-dev/user/quickstart.html> Output has been suppressed here. For a more detailed look at these examples browse the Jupyter notebook: [NumPy and J Make Sweet Array Love](#).

Creating simple arrays

```
# numpy
a = np.arange(15).reshape(3, 5)

NB. J
a =. 3 5 $ i. 15

# numpy
a = np.array([2,3,4])

NB. J
a =. 2 3 4

# numpy
b = np.array([(1.5,2,3), (4,5,6)])
```

```

NB. J
b =. 1.5 2 3 ,: 4 5 6

# numpy
c = np.array( [ [1,2], [3,4] ], dtype=complex )

NB. J
θ j.~ 1 2 ,: 3 4

# numpy - make complex numbers with nonzero real and imaginary parts
c + (0+4.7j)

NB. J - also for J
c + 0j4.7

# numpy
np.zeros( (3,4) )

NB. J
3 4 $ 0

# numpy - allocates array with whatever is in memory
np.empty( (2,3) )

NB. J - uses fill - safer but slower than numpy's trust memory method
2 3 $ 0.0001

```

Basic operations

```

# numpy
a = np.array( [20,30,40,50] )
b = np.arange( 4 )
c = a - b

NB. J
a =. 20 30 40 50
b =. i. 4

```

```

c =. a - b

# numpy - uses previously defined (b)
b ** 2

NB. J
b ^ 2

# numpy - uses previously defined (a)
10 * np.sin(a)

NB. J
10 * 1 o. a

# numpy - booleans are True and False
a < 35

NB. J - booleans are 1 and 0
a < 35

```

Array processing

```

# numpy
a = np.array( [[1,1], [0,1]] )
b = np.array( [[2,0], [3,4]] )
# elementwise product
a * b

NB. J
a =. 1 1 ,: 0 1
b =. 2 0 ,: 3 4
a * b

# numpy - matrix product
np.dot(a, b)

NB. J - matrix product
a +/ . * b

```

```

# numpy - uniform pseudo random
a = np.random.random( (2,3) )

NB. J - uniform pseudo random
a =. ? 2 3 $ 0

# numpy - sum all array elements - implicit ravel
a.sum(a)

NB. J - sum all array elements - explicit ravel
+/ , a

# numpy
b = np.arange(12).reshape(3,4)
# sum of each column
b.sum(axis=0)
# min of each row
b.min(axis=1)
# cumulative sum along each row
b.cumsum(axis=1)
# transpose
b.T

NB. J
b =. 3 4 $ i. 12
NB. sum of each column
+/ b
NB. min of each row
<./"1 b
NB. cumulative sum along each row
+/\\"0 1 b
NB. transpose
|: b

```

Indexing and slicing

```
# numpy
a = np.arange(10) ** 3
a[2]
a[2:5]
a[ : :-1] # reversal

NB. J
a = (i. 10) ^ 3
2 { a
(2 + i. 3) { a
| . a
```

Informed Naked Ape Protocol

Posted: 08 May 2018 19:09:28

Many think we are living in a golden age of bullshit. That public discourse has never been gaudier or more demeaning. That respect for truth and decency has reached all-time lows. The mental pygmies that hold these opinions don't read or think for themselves. Deceiving ourselves and others is the one thing our species excels at. Lies are the bedrock of art, economics, politics, and religion. Only two tiny slivers of human thought have ever breached the bullshit barrier and approached something that might be credibly labeled truth: hard science, and harder mathematics.

If you think I am going to praise brave men, (and bitches), of science for lighting a candle in the perpetual darkness, (Carl Sagan already wrote [an entire fawning book](#) on this self-aggrandizing theme), think again. Scientists are just as flawed and full of crap as the rest of us. Science occasionally succeeds because it has evolved protocols that correct for human bullshit. A good protocol protects us against our worst enemy — ourselves.

My *Informed Naked Ape Protocol*, or *iNap* for short, consists of eleven⁷⁴ pithy maxims that force a [hard ass skeptical](#) view of things. I will manifest my maxims here and elaborate on each one in following posts.

⁷⁴Why eleven? The last time somebody tried to get the inhabitants of planet moron to follow ten simple rules it didn't work out.

Informed Naked Ape Protocol

1. Enough people are scum.
2. Trust is for imbeciles.
3. “Belief” is a bullshit word.
4. Assume corruption.
5. Analyze the data, not the drivel.
6. Demand full analytic disclosure.
7. Practice relentless verification.
8. Centralized systems are always corrupted.
9. If you don’t control it you cannot trust it.
10. Only scientific and mathematical arguments are admissible.
11. Correct errors.

iNap #1: Enough People are Scum

Posted: 17 May 2018 20:45:27

Intelligible systems are built on a few basic principles.⁷⁵ While reducing my dour skepticism to the memorable maxims that codify *Informed Naked Ape Protocol*. I repeatedly asked myself what animates unflagging skepticism? What turns naturally cheerful and optimistic people like myself into raging cynics? What motivates **noble trolls** to put down the pizza and grab the keyboard? *Only one answer sprang to mind: other people.*

Regardless of your politics, gender, education, race, age, nationality, or ethnicity, you have probably noticed there are a lot of scummy people out there.

Why is this?

⁷⁵The human preference for systems with a few axioms is an artifact of our primitive intellects. There are few if any human beings that would be comfortable with axiomatic theories that depend on trillions of independent axioms yet we know that such systems exist and remain incomplete. Our drive to reduce things to a manageable set of rules, even when we know it is naïve and futile, amounts to little more than thumb-sucking. It makes our baby brains happy even if it will not solve our problems.

The answer derives from our evolution. Evolutionary advantages often accrue to individuals that cheat. Cheating is a fundamental behavioral adaptation that has been observed in many animal, bird and plant species. ***Cheating is so common that cheating the system is the system!*** How cheaters might benefit was best illustrated in the hilarious [Ricky Gervais](#) movie [The Invention of Lying](#). In Ricky's world, everybody told the truth until one day he discovered that you could lie. The best scene in the film has Ricky running into a beautiful woman on the street. He tells her that the world is doomed unless she immediately agrees to have sex with him. Given the dire circumstances, she instantly agrees to save the world. Clearly, liars are going to enjoy immense reproductive success in a world of truth tellers. Similarly, scumbags will profit in a world of purely honorable people.

We don't live in a world of purely honorable people or purely scummy people. Human scum density is complicated; it depends on more variables than the weather. Nevertheless, we can infer that human scum density is *seldom zero* and is *often appreciable*.

How big is appreciable?

My bitter sampling of humanity yields an estimate of approximately 0.05 for contemporary American society.⁷⁶ It's definitely bad news that 5% of the people around you cannot be trusted or depended on. It's even worse news that human scum, like pond scum, often floats to the upper echelons of society. This is a nasty reality and I wish it wasn't so but reality is often unpleasant and leaves few options: either adapt or be crushed.

The first step in adapting to scummy naked apes is acknowledging the most fundamental fact about them — *enough people are scum!*

⁷⁶Yes, human scum density varies with culture. Some societies are briefly more virtuous than others.

2019

The Return of the Prodigal Blogger

Posted: 05 Oct 2019 20:07:35

It's been ages since my last blog post. Yes, I've been a very, very bad blogger. Lesser men would throw themselves on the metaphorical feet of their readers and beg for forgiveness but if you're expecting apologies you don't know me! I write for myself; if you choose to read my ramblings, well that's on you.

Since my last entry I have:

1. **Retired.** I finally pulled the plug on being a *so-called productive member of society*. Now I'm an old Social Security draining parasite. *Since I no longer pay net taxes I am effectively dead to the state and they would love it if I was actually dead.* Dead people are easier to finance. Unfortunately, I've always been on to the deep state and my new mission in life is to claw back every single tax dollar I ever paid with butt loads of interest. When I snuff off this mortal coil I am going stick you with a giant uncollectable I OWE FUCKING YOU! If you create financially unsustainable systems that encourage abuse, well guess what, you're going to get abused. God, I'm loving being a bitter old man; it's what I was born to be.
2. **Continued to pursue my hobbies, especially photography.** This year (2019) I set the mini-goals of shooting, on average, one picture per day and scanning at least three hundred prints and slides. This may not sound like a lot but it takes *me* time to select the best images, process RAW files, restore film scans, edit or hack pictures, write captions and [compute keywords](#). I treat every uploaded image as a *milliblogging* opportunity. Some of my image captions are longer than some of my blog posts.
3. **Taken on some new family responsibilities and obligations.**
4. **Taken some trips.**
5. **Worked on various personal software projects.**

Arthur C. Clarke once remarked that only unimaginative people get bored. I've always had something on my mind and I've always lived in my head. This has always been my problem and my strength. With retirement, I am casting off my shriveled shackles of pretense. I'm not even going to pretend to care about other people's

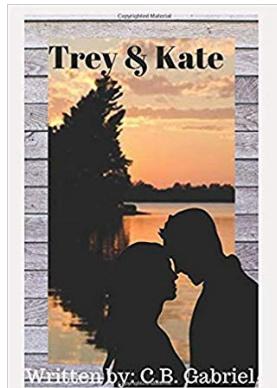
problems. I will think about what I find fascinating and do what I find worthwhile.

Call it retirement privilege snowflakes!

Now get back to work and pay your taxes you have old parasites to support.

Trey and Kate: Review

Posted: 08 Nov 2019 22:00:43



This will be a completely biased review. I have a close relationship with the author so everything I say must be verified. Please buy *Trey and Kate*, read it, and make up your mind. With that caveat out of the way let's get started.

Trey and Kate is a tale about an on and off again Millennial romance that plays out in Kingston Ontario. The two leads are not exactly star crossed lovers. They're both partly broken and struggling with mental illness, past life hallucinations, deficient friends, and uncomprehending divorced families. Kate is bipolar and goes on and off her meds throughout. Trey is stuck in a dead-end barista job: remember Millennials. He's mourning a deceased unloving father and has only two reliable relationships: his cat and his mother. Trey and Kate's dreams hint at a shared past and promise a joint future but offer little practical guidance.

With destiny seemingly on their side, you would expect their romance to go smoothly; it does not. When Kate goes off her meds she's impulsive and prone to risky behavior. The book's best passages detail her sordid bouts of random sex with total strangers. It's almost prostitution but Kate doesn't have the business sense of a prostitute. Of course, this doesn't help her relationship with Trey. To his credit or shame, he forgives her but we're not sure if his forgiveness is self-pity. Trey's self-esteem is so low he finds it almost comical than any woman could love him. Welcome to the club Trey. Trey and Kate's interaction is both frustrating, satisfying, embarrassing, irritating and fulfilling.

Trey and Kate is the author's first book. I know the author struggled to put the book together. Its best parts are purely descriptive and when the author shows us what the characters are seeing and feeling the prose tells. When the text ventures into rhetorical semi-poetic asides it hollows out. *Trey and Kate* feels like a screenplay disguised as a novel. This is partly due to the almost cinematic presence of the

setting Kingston Ontario, a dull stone-filled town that would be unlivable without Lake Ontario, and Kingston's wretched weather which is every bit as bad as it's portrayed in *Trey and Kate*. I'd encourage the author to keep writing, rewriting and experimenting. There are good stories to tell here.

Who Thought Blinking Windfarms was a Good Idea?

Posted: 10 Nov 2019 18:41:26

One night, a few weeks ago, I was driving west on I86 near American Falls when I spotted a long string of blinking red lights. The lights stretched over a large arc of the horizon. My first thought was "Jesus H. Christ now what?" As an amateur astronomer, I have climbed mountains to get away from light pollution. Now some [jackwagon](#) was ruining an entire rural horizon with a goddamn string of synchronized windfarm lights.

May I ask why?

Windfarms blink at night to warn planes they're flying to low. Please! The towers are well under 300 meters. If you are flying a plane below 300 meters in mountainous locales like Idaho you have far more serious problems than running into wind turbines. This is another example of stupid regulation. There is absolutely no good reason for lighting up entire landscapes. It wrecks the view, distracts drivers, (cars on I86 were slowing down to get a better view), wastes energy, rapes the night sky, and reminds everyone what an environmental tax-subsidized eyesore windfarms are. Don't even think of disagreeing. When was the last time you looked at a landscape littered with wind turbines and thought, "This is so much better than it was before."

Yes, I know windfarms are saving us from global warming. If you believe that you are probably exactly the type of person that signed off on ruining an entire county's nighttime view with goddamn blinking windfarms.



Click for sky fornication! Some comments attached to this YouTube clip bitch about how light pollution *is a small price to pay for green energy*. Why pay any price you dumb shits? Keep the wind turbines but turn off their damn blinking lights at night. *It's a landscape sodomizing abomination!*

Sudden Genocide

Posted: 15 Nov 2019 17:23:59

If genocide is sudden, painless, unexpected, complete and absolute, if a people simply vanish without screams, without fear, without *anticipation*, if one nanosecond they are and the next nanosecond they *are not*, and if somehow you are responsible, are you a war criminal or a savior? Ultimately we all vanish, usually with screams, usually with fear, usually with anticipation. For years I've longed for a sudden painless death: a *dismembering* that tears me apart faster than my nerves can relay pain. Imagine such an end for all of us – at once – now. *Why linger?* We will go extinct. There will be a last human. And if the last human dies with screams, with fear, with anticipation how is that better than sudden genocide?

2020

Extracting SQL code from SSIS dtsx packages with Python lxml

Posted: 21 Jan 2020 02:30:48

Lately, I've been refactoring a sprawling SSIS (SQL Server Integration Services) package that ineffectually wrestles with large XML files. In this programmer's opinion using SSIS for heavy-duty XML parsing is geeky self-abuse so I've opted to replace an eye-ball straining⁷⁷ SSIS package with half a dozen, "as simple as possible but no simpler", Python scripts. If the Python is fast enough for production great! If not the scripts will serve as a clear model⁷⁸ for something faster.

I'm only refactoring⁷⁹ part of a larger ETL process so whatever I do *it must mesh with the rest of the mess*.

So where is the rest of the SSIS mess?

SSIS's visual editor does a wonderful job of hiding the damn code!

This is a problem!

If only there was a simple way to troll through large sprawling SSIS *spider-webby* packages and extract [the good bits](#). Fortunately, Python's XML parsing tools can be easily applied to SSIS `dtsx` files. *SSIS dtsx files are XML files*. The following code snippets illustrate how to hack these files.

First import the required Python modules. `lxml` is not always included in Python distributions. Use the `pip` or `conda` tools to install this module.

```
# imports
import os
from lxml import etree
```

⁷⁷I frequently run into SSIS packages that cannot be viewed on 4K monitors when fully zoomed out.

⁷⁸Python's readability is a major asset when disentangling *mess-ware*.

⁷⁹Yes, I've railed about the word "refactoring" in the past but I've moved on and so should you. ["A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds."](#)

Set an output directory. I'm running on a Windows machine. If you're on a Mac or Linux machine adjust the path.

```
# set sql output directory
sql_out = r"C:\temp\dtsxsql"
if not os.path.isdir(sql_out):
    os.makedirs(sql_out)
```

Point to the `dtsx` package you want to extract code from.

```
# dtsx files
dtsx_path = r'C:\Users\john\AnacondaProjects\testfolder\bixml'
ssis_dtsx = dtsx_path + r'\ParseXML.dtsx'
```

Read and parse the SSIS package.

```
tree = etree.parse(ssis_dtsx)
root = tree.getroot()
```

`lxml` renders XML namespace tags like `<DTS:Executable` as `www.microsoft.com/SqlServer/Dts\}Executable`. The following gathers all the transformed element tags in the `dtsx` package.

```
# collect unique element tags in dtsx
ele_set = set()
for ele in root.xpath(".//*"):
    ele_set.add(ele.tag)
print(ele_set)
print(len(ele_set))
```

Using transformed element tags of interest blast over the `dtsx` and suck out the bits of interest.

```
# extract sql code in source statements and write to *.sql files
total_bytes = 0
package_name = root.attrib['{www.microsoft.com/SqlServer/Dts}ObjectName'].replace(" ", "")
for cnt, ele in enumerate(root.xpath(".//*")):
    if ele.tag == "{www.microsoft.com/SqlServer/Dts}Executable":
        attr = ele.attrib
        for child0 in ele:
            if child0.tag == "{www.microsoft.com/SqlServer/Dts}ObjectData":
                for child1 in child0:
                    sql_comment = attr["{www.microsoft.com/SqlServer/Dts}ObjectName"].strip()
                    if child1.tag == "{www.microsoft.com/sqlserver/dts/tasks/sqltask}SqlTaskData":
                        dtsx_sql = child1.attrib["{www.microsoft.com/sqlserver/dts/tasks/sqltask}SqlStatementSource"]
```

```

dtsx_sql = " -- " + sql_comment + "\n" + dtsx_sql
sql_file = sql_out + "\\ " + package_name + str(cnt) + ".sql"
total_bytes += len(dtsx_sql)
print((len(dtsx_sql), sql_comment, sql_file))
with open(sql_file, "w") as file:
    file.write(dtsx_sql)
print('total sql code bytes',total_bytes)

```

The code snippets in this post are available in this Jupyter notebook: [Extracting SQL code from SSIS dtsx packages with Python lxml](#). *Download and tweak for your dtsx nightmare!*

More J Pandoc Syntax HighLighting

Posted: 20 Feb 2020 02:48:09

Syntax highlighting is essential for blogging program code. Many blog hosts recognize this and provide tools for highlighting programming languages. [WordPress.com](#) (this host) has a [nifty highlighting tool](#) that handles dozens of mainstream programming languages. Unfortunately, one of my favorite programming languages, [J](#), (yes it's a single letter name), is way out of the mainstream and is not supported.

There are a few ways to deal with this *problem*.

1. Eschew J highlighting.
2. Upgrade⁸⁰ your *WordPress.com* subscription and install custom syntax highlighters that can handle arbitrary language definitions.
3. Find another blog host that freely supports custom highlighters.
4. Roll your own or customize an existing highlighter.

A few years ago I went with the fourth option and hacked the superb open-source tool [pandoc](#). The grim details are described in [this blog post](#). My hack produced a customized version of pandoc with J highlighting. I still use my hacked version and I'd probably stick with it if current pandoc versions had not introduced *must-have features like converting Jupyter notebooks to Markdown, PDF, LaTeX and HTML*. Jupyter is my default *thinking-things-through* programming environment. I've even taken to [blogging with Jupyter notebooks](#). If you write and explain code you owe it to yourself to give Jupyter a try.

⁸⁰The pay more option is always available.

Unwilling to eschew J highlighting or forgo Jupyter I was on the verge of re-hacking pandoc when I read the current pandoc (version 2.9.1.1) documentation and saw that ***J is now officially supported by pandoc.*** You can verify this with the shell commands.

The pandoc developers made my day! I felt like [Wayne meeting a rock star](#).

Highlighting J is now a simple matter of placing J code in markdown blocks like:

```
~~~~ { .j }
... code code code ...
~~~~
```

and issuing shell commands like:

```
pandoc --highlight-style tango --metadata title="J test" -s jpdh.md -o jpdh.html
```

The previous command generated the HTML of this post which I pasted into the WordPress.com *Classic Editor*. Not only do I get J code highlighting on the cheap I also get footnotes which, *for god freaking sakes*,⁸¹ are not supported by the new WordPress block editor for low budget blogs.

The source markdown used for this post is available here enjoy!

```
tdkeytest=:4 : 0

NB.*tdkeytest v-- test natural primary key columns of TAB delimited text files.
NB.

NB. dyad: il =. blclColnames tdkeytest clFile
NB.

NB. f0=. 'C:\temp\dailytsv\raw_ST_BU.txt'
NB. k0=. ;:'BuId XMLFileDialog'
NB. k0 tdkeytest f0

NB. first row is header
h=. 0{d=. readtd2s y

NB. key column positions
'header key column(s) missing' assert -.(#h) e. p=. h i. s: x
```

⁸¹WordPress.com is beginning to remind me of Adobe. Stop taking away longstanding features when upgrading!

```

c=. #d=. }. d
b=. ~:p {"1 d

NB. columns unique, rowcnt, nonunique rowcnt
if. r=. c = +/b do.
  r , c , 0
else.
  NB. there are duplicates show some sorted duplicate keys
  k=. p {"1 d
  d=. d {~ I. k e. k #~ -.b
  d=. (/: p {"1 d) { d
  b=. ~:p {"1 d
  m=. +/b
  smoutput (":@m),' duplicate key blocks'
  n=. DUPSHOW <.. m
  smoutput 'first ',(":@n),' duplicate row key blocks'
  smoutput (<p { h) ,&.> n {. ,. b <;.1 p {"1 d
  r , c , #d
end.
)

```

Using jodliterate

Posted: 25 May 2020 19:02:26

The [JODSOURCE](#) addon, (a part of the [JOD](#) system), contains a handy *literate programming* tool that enables the generation of *beautiful* J source code documents.

The *Bible*, *Koran*, and *Bhagavad Gita* of Literate Programming is Donald Knuth's [masterful](#) tome of the same name.

Knuth applied Literate Programming to his [TeX](#) systems and produced what many consider [enduring masterpieces](#) of program documentation.

`jodliterate` is certainly [not worthy](#) of [TeX](#) level accolades but with a little work it's possible to produce fine documents. This [J kernel notebook](#) outlines how you can install and use `jodliterate`. [Jupyter](#) notebooks are typically executed but to accommodate J users that do hot have Jupyter this notebook is also available on GitHub as a [static PDF document](#).

Notebook Preliminaries

```
[1]: NB. show J kernel version  
9!:14 ''
```

j901/j64avx/windows/release-e/commercial/www.jsoftware.com/2020-01-29T11:15:50

```
[2]: NB. load JOD in a clear base locale  
load 'general/jod' [ clear ''
```

NB. The distributed JOD profile automatically RESETME's.
NB. To safely use dictionaries with many J tasks they must
NB. be READONLY. To prevent opening the same put dictionary
NB. READWRITE comment out (dpset) and restart this notebook.
dpset 'RESETME'

NB. Converting Jupyter notebooks to LaTeX is
NB. simplified by ASCII box characters.
portchars ''

NB. Verb to show large boxed displays in
NB. the notebook without ugly wrapping.
sbx_ijod_=: ' ... ' , "1~ 75&{."1@":

Installing jodliterate

To use `jodliterate` you need to:

1. Install a current version of J.
2. Install the J addons JOD, JODSOURCE, and JODDOCUMENT.
3. Build the JOD development dictionaries from JODSOURCE.
4. Install a current version of [pandoc](#).
5. Install a current version of [TeX](#) and [L^AT_EX](#).
6. Make the `jodliterate` J script.
7. Run `jodliterate` on a JOD *group* with pandoc compatible document fragments.
8. Compile the files of the previous step to produce a PDF

When presented with long lists of program prerequisites my impulse is to *run!* Life is too short for configuration wars. Everything should be easy. Installing `jodliterate` requires more work than phone apps but compared to [enterprise installations](#) setting up `jodliterate` is trivial. We'll go through it step by step.

Step 1: Install a current version of J J is freely available at jsoftware.com. J installation instructions can be found on the [J Wiki](#) on [this page](#).

Follow the appropriate instructions for your OS.

Note: JOD runs on Windows, Linux, and MacOS versions of J, hence these are the only platforms that currently support `jodliterate`.

Step 2: Install the J addons JOD, JODSOURCE and JODDOCUMENT

After installing J install the J addons. J addons are installed with the J package manager `pacman`. Pacman has three [IDE](#) flavors: a command-line flavor and two GUI flavors. The GUI flavors depend on [JQT](#) or [JHS](#). The GUI flavors of pacman are only available on some versions of J whereas the command line version is part of the base J install and is available on all platforms.

I install all the addons. I recommend that you do the same.

JOD depends on some J modules like `jfiles`, `regex`, and `task` that are sometimes distributed as addons. If you install all addons JOD's modules and dependents are both installed.

Installing addons with command line pacman Start J and do:

[3]: NB. install J addons with command-line pacman

```
load 'pacman'    NB. load pacman jpkg services
```

[4]: 'help' jpkg '' NB. what can you do for me?

Valid options are:

```
history, install, manifest, remove, reinstall, search,  
show, showinstalled, shownotinstalled, showupgrade,  
status, update, upgrade
```

https://code.jsoftware.com/wiki/JAL/Package_Manager/jpkg

[5]: NB. install all addons
NB. see <https://code.jsoftware.com/wiki/Pacman>

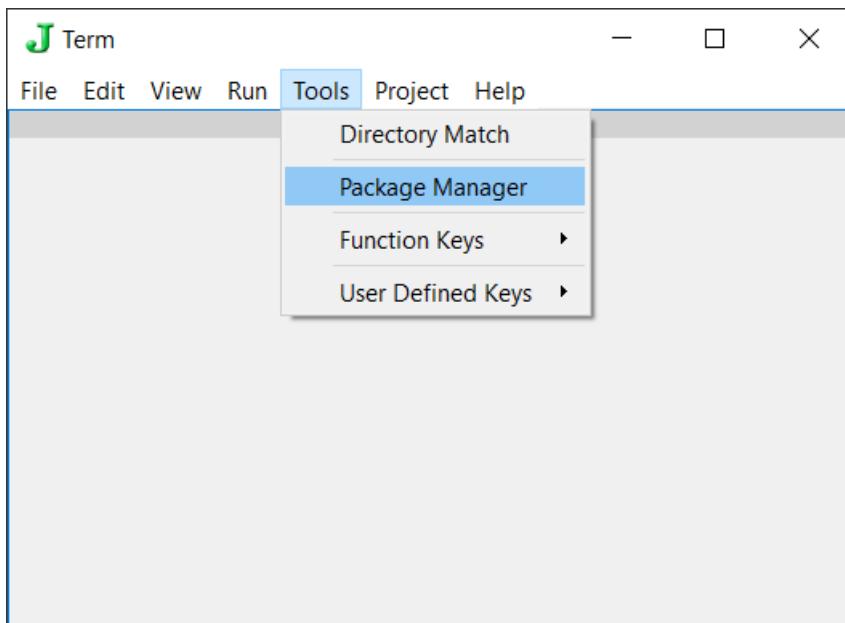
```
NB. uncomment next line if addons not installed  
NB. 'install' jpkg '*' NB.
```

```
[6]: 3 {. 'showinstalled' jpkg '' NB. first few installed addons
```

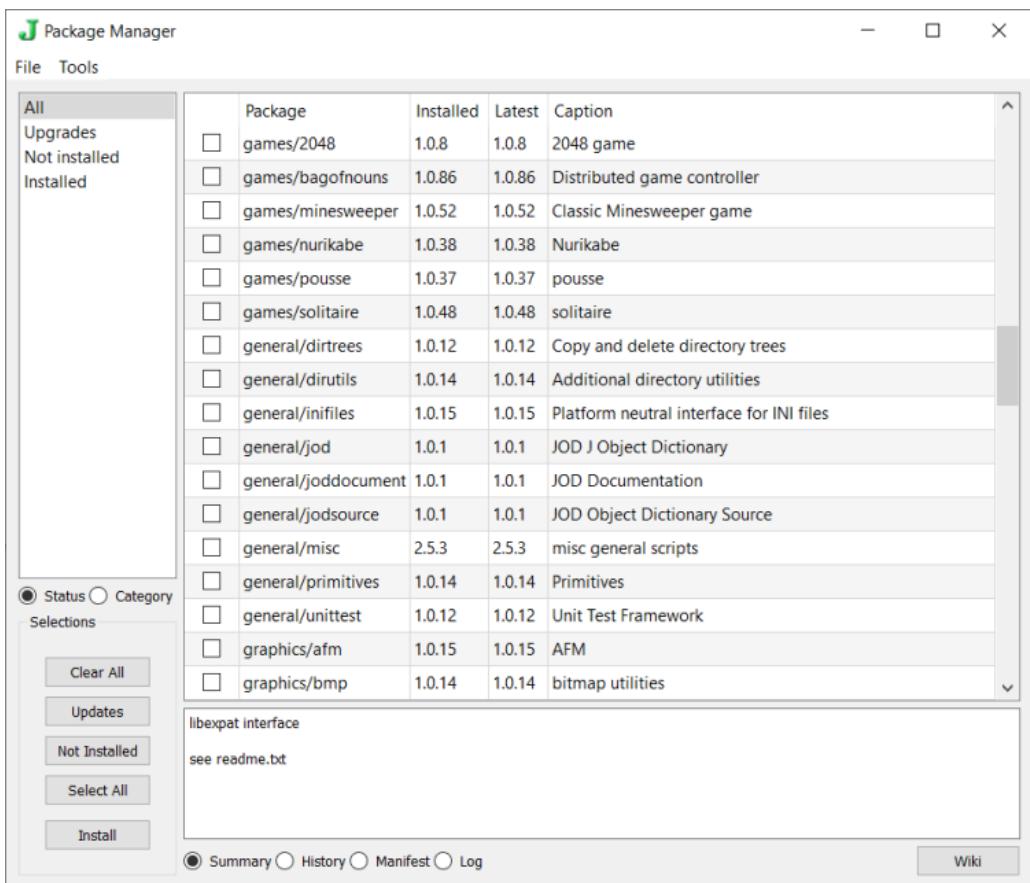
```
+-----+-----+-----+  
|api/expat|1.0.11|1.0.11|libexpat |  
+-----+-----+-----+  
|api/gles |1.0.31|1.0.31|Modern OpenGL API |  
+-----+-----+-----+  
|api/java |1.0.2 |1.0.2 |api: Java to J shared library|  
+-----+-----+-----+
```

```
[7]: 'showupgrade' jpkg '' NB. list addon updates
```

Installing addons with JQT GUI pacman I mostly use the Windows JQT version of pacman to install and maintain J addons. You can find pacman on the tools menu.



pacman shows all available addons and provides tools for installing, updating, and removing them.



The GUI version is easy to use. Press the **Select All** button and then press the **Install** button to install all the addons. To update addons select the **Upgrades** menu and select the addons you want to update.

Step 3: Build the JOD development dictionaries from JODSOURCE
JOD source code is distributed in the form of [JOD dictionary dumps](#). Dictionary dumps are large J scripts that serialize JOD dictionaries. Dumps contain everything stored in dictionaries. You will find source code, binary data, test scripts, documentation, build macros, and more in typical JOD dictionaries.

`jodliterate` is stored as a JOD dictionary group. A dictionary group is simply a collection of J words with optional *header* and *post-processor* scripts. JOD generates J scripts from groups. Before we can *make jodliterate* we must load the JOD development dictionaries. The JODSOURCE addon includes a J script that [loads](#) development dictionaries.

Again, start J and do:

```
[8]: require 'general/jod'
```

```
[9]: NB. set a JODroot user folder  
NB. if not set /jod/ is the default
```

```
NB. use paths for your OS  
UserFolders_j_=: UserFolders_j_ , 'JODroot';'c:/temp'  
  
NB. show added folder  
UserFolders_j_ {~ (0 {"1 UserFolders_j_) i. <'JODroot'
```

```
+-----+-----+  
| JODroot|c:/temp|  
+-----+-----+
```

```
[10]: NB. load JOD developement dictionaries  
load_dev_tmp=: 3 : 0  
if. +./ (::_('joddev jod utils') e. od '') do.  
    'dev dictionaries exist'  
else.  
    0!:0<jpath'~addons/general/jodsourcessetup.ij'  
end.  
)  
  
load_dev_tmp 0
```

```
dev dictionaries exist
```

```
[11]: NB. joddev, jod, utils should exist  
  
erase 'load_dev_tmp'  
(::_('joddev jod utils') e. od '')
```

```
1 1 1
```

Step 4: Install a current version of pandoc [pandoc](#) is easily one of the most useful markup utilities on the [intertubes](#). If you routinely deal with markup formats

like markdown, XML, L^AT_EX, json and you aren't using pandoc you are working too hard.

Be lazy! [Install pandoc](#).

jodliterate uses the `task` addon to *shell out* to pandoc. Versions of pandoc after 2.9.1.1 support J syntax high-lighting.

```
[12]: NB. show pandoc version from J - make sure you are running
NB. a recent version of pandoc. There may be different
NB. versions in many locations on various systems.
```

```
ppath=: '"C:\Program Files\Pandoc\pandoc"'
THISPANDOC_ajodliterate_=: ppath
shell THISPANDOC_ajodliterate_, ' --version'
```

```
pandoc 2.9.1.1
Compiled with pandoc-types 1.20, texmath 0.12, skylighting 0.8.3
Default user data directory: C:\Users\john\AppData\Roaming\pandoc
Copyright (C) 2006-2019 John MacFarlane
Web: https://pandoc.org
This is free software; see the source for copying conditions.
There is no warranty, not even for merchantability or fitness
for a particular purpose.
```

```
[13]: NB. make sure your version of pandoc
NB. supports J syntax-highlighting

NB. appends line feed character if necessary
tlf=:] , ((10{a.})"_ = {::} ). (10{a.})_

NB. J is on the supported languages list
pcmd=: THISPANDOC_ajodliterate_, ' --list-highlight-languages'
(<;_.2 tlf (shell pcmd) -. CR) e.~ <, 'j'
```

1

Step 5: Install a current version of L^AT_EX jodliterate uses L^AT_EX to compile PDF documents. When `setjodliterate` runs it sets an output directory and writes a

\LaTeX preamble file `JODLiteratePreamble.tex` to it. It's a good idea to review this file to get an idea of the \LaTeX packages `jodliterate` uses. It's possible that some of these packages are not in your \LaTeX distribution and will have to be installed.

To ease the burden of \LaTeX package maintenance I use freely available \TeX versions that automatically install missing packages.

1. On Windows I use [MiK\TeX](#)
2. On other platforms I use [TeXLive](#)

If your system automatically installs packages the first time you compile `jodliterate` output it may fetch missing packages from The Comprehensive \TeX Archive Network ([CTAN](#)). If new packages are installed reprocess your files a few times to insure all the required packages are downloaded and installed.

Step: 6 Make the `jodliterate` J script Once the JOD development dictionaries are built (Step 3) making `jodliterate` is easy. Start J and do:

```
[14]: require 'general/jod'

NB. open dictionaries
od ;:'joddev jod utils' [ 3 od ''
```



```
+-----+
|1|opened (rw/ro/ro) ->|joddev|jod|utils|
+-----+
```

```
[15]: NB. generate jodliterate
sbx mls 'jodliterate'
```



```
+-----+
|1|load script saved ->|c:/jod/joddev/script/jodliterate.ijs| ...
+-----+ ...
```

`mls` creates a standard J load script. Once generated this script can be loaded with the standard J `load` utility. You can test this by restarting J without JOD and loading `jodliterate`.

```
[16]: NB. load generated script
load 'jodliterate'
```

```

NB. (jodliterate) interface word(s):
NB. -----
NB. THISPANDOC    NB. full pandoc path - use (pandoc) if on shell path
NB. grplit        NB. make latex for group (y)
NB. ifacesection  NB. interface section summary string
NB. ifc           NB. format interface comment text
NB. setjodliterate NB. prepare LaTeX processing - sets out directory writes
preamble

```

NOTE: adjust pandoc path if version (pandoc 2.9.1.1) is not >= 2.9.1.1

Step 7: Run jodliterate on a JOD group with pandoc compatible document fragments This sounds a lot worse than it is. There is a group in `utils` called `sunmoon` that has an interesting *pandoc compatible document fragment*.

Start J and do:

```
[17]: require 'general/jod'
od 'utils' [ 3 od ''
```

```
+-----+
|1|opened (ro) ->|utils|
+-----+
```

```
[18]: NB. display short explanations for (sunmoon) words
sbx hlpnl }. grp 'sunmoon'
```

```
+-----+-----+ ...
|IFACEWORDSSunmoon|interface words (IFACEWORDSSunmoon) group ...
|NORISESET        |indicates sun never rises or sets in (sunriseset0) and ( ...
|ROOTWORDSSunmoon|root words (ROOTWORDSSunmoon) group ...
|arctan           |arc tangent ...
|calmoons         |calendar dates of new and full moons ...
|cos              |cosine radians ...
|fromjulian       |converts Julian day numbers to dates, converse (tojulian ...
|moons            |times of new and full moons for n calendar years ...
|round             |round (y) to nearest (x) (e.g. 1000 round 12345) ...
|sin              |sine radians ...
```

```

|sunriseset0      |computes sun rise and set times - see group documentation ...
|sunriseset1      |computes sun rise and set times - see group documentation ...
|tabit            |promotes only atoms and lists to tables ...
|tan               |tan radians ...
|today             |returns todays date ...
|yeardates         |returns all valid dates for n calendar years ...
+-----+-----+-----+-----+-----+-----+

```

[19]: NB. display part of the (sunmoon) group document header
NB. this is pandoc compatible markdown - note the LaTeX
NB. commands - pandoc allows markdown/LaTeX mixtures
900 {. 2 9 disp 'sunmoon'

`sunmoon` is a collection of basic astronomical algorithms
The key verbs are `moons`, `sunriseset0` and `sunriseset1`.
All of these verbs were derived from BASIC programs published
in *Sky & Telescope* magazine in the 1990's. The rest of
the verbs in `sunmoon` are mostly date and trigonometric
utilities.

\subsection{\texttt{sunmoon} Interface}

```

~~~~ { .j }
calmoons      NB. calendar dates of new and full moons
moons        NB. times of new and full moons for n calendar years
sunriseset0    NB. computes sun rise and set times - see group documentation
sunriseset1    NB. computes sun rise and set times - see group documentation
~~~~

```

\subsection{\textbf{\texttt{sunriseset0}}} \textit{sunrise and sunset times}

This verb has been adapted from a BASIC program submitted by
Robin G. Stuart *Sky & Telescope's* shortest sunrise/set
program cont

[20]: NB. run jodliterate on (sunmoon)
require 'jodliterate'

```
NB. set the output directory - when  
NB. running in Jupyter use a subdirectory  
NB. of your notebook directory.  
  
ltxpath= 'C:\Users\john\AnacondaProjects\testfolder\grplit\'  
setjodliterate ltxpath
```

```
+-----+  
|1|C:\Users\john\AnacondaProjects\testfolder\grplit\|  
+-----+
```

[21]: NB. (grplit) returns a list of generated
NB. LaTeX and command files. The *.bat
NB. file compiles the generated LaTeX

```
,, grplit 'sunmoon'
```

```
+-----+  
|1|  
+-----+  
|C:\Users\john\AnacondaProjects\testfolder\grplit\sunmoon.tex |  
+-----+  
|C:\Users\john\AnacondaProjects\testfolder\grplit\sunmoontitle.tex|  
+-----+  
|C:\Users\john\AnacondaProjects\testfolder\grplit\sunmoonoview.tex|  
+-----+  
|C:\Users\john\AnacondaProjects\testfolder\grplit\sunmooncode.tex |  
+-----+  
|C:\Users\john\AnacondaProjects\testfolder\grplit\sunmoon.bat |  
+-----+
```

Step 8: Compile the files of the previous step to produce a PDF

[22]: _250 {. shell ltxpath, 'sunmoon.bat'

```
gular.otf><c:/program files/miktex 2.9/fonts/ope  
nntype/public/lm/lmmono12-regular.otf>  
Output written on sunmoon.pdf (22 pages, 107711 bytes).  
Transcript written on sunmoon.log.
```

(base) C:\Users\john\AnacondaProjects\testfolder\grplit>endlocal

```
[23]: NB. uncomment to display generated PDF  
      NB. shell ltxpath,'sunmoon.pdf'
```

Storing jodliterate pandoc compatible document fragments in JOD Effective use of `jodliterate` requires a melange of Markdown, L^AT_EX, JOD, and J skills combined with a healthy attitude about *experimentation*. You have to try things and see if they work!

However, before you can *try* `jodliterate` document fragments you have `put` them in JOD dictionaries.

`jodliterate` uses two types of document fragments:

1. markdown overview group documents.
 2. L^AT_EX overview macros.

Markdown group documents are transformed by pandoc into L^AT_EX but the overview macros are not altered in any way. This enables the use of arbitrarily complex L^AT_EX. The following examples show how to insert document fragments.

Create a jodliterate Demo Dictionary

```
[24]: NB. create a demo dictionary - (didnum) insures new name  
require 'general/jod'  
  
NB. new dictionary in default JOD directory  
sbx newd itslit_ijod_=: 'aaa',":didnum_ajod_ ''
```

```
+-----+-----+-----+
|1|dictionary created ->|aaa327403631806685638405507439206657280913|c:/user ...
+-----+-----+-----+
```

[25]: NB. 1 if new dictionary created
(*itslit*) e. od ''

```
[26]: od itslit [ 3 od '' NB. open only new dictionary
```

```
+-----+  
|1|opened (rw) ->|aaa327403631806685638405507439206657280913|  
+-----+
```

```
[27]: NB. define some words
```

```
freq=:~. ; #/ .~  
movmean=-@[ (+/ % #)\ ]  
geomean=# %: */  
bmi=: 704.5"_ * ] % [: *: [  
polyprod=:+/ .@(*/)  
  
wlst=: ;:'freq movmean geomean bmi polyprod'
```

```
NB. put in dictionary
```

```
put wlst
```

```
NB. short word explanations
```

```
t=: ,: 'freq';'frequency distribution'  
t=: t , 'movmean';'moving mean'  
t=: t , 'geomean';'geometric mean of a list'  
t=: t , 'bmi';'body mass index - (x) inches (y) lbs'  
t=: t , 'polyprod';'polynomial product'
```

```
0 8 put t
```

```
+-----+  
|1|5 word explanation(s) put in ->|aaa327403631806685638405507439206657280913|  
+-----+
```

```
[28]: NB. make header and macro groups
```

```
grp 'litheader' ; wlst  
grp 'litmacro' ; wlst
```

```
+-----+  
|1|group <litmacro> put in ->|aaa327403631806685638405507439206657280913|  
+-----+
```

```
[29]: IFACEWORDSLitheader=: wlst  
put 'IFACEWORDSLitheader'
```

```
+-----+  
|1|1 word(s) put in ->|aaa327403631806685638405507439206657280913|  
+-----+
```

Use Group Document Overview Markdown

```
[30]: NB. add group header markdown
```

```
litheader=: (0 : 0)  
'litheader' is a markdown demo group.
```

This markdown text will be
[transmogrified](<https://calvinandhobbes.fandom.com>)
by `pandoc` to \LaTeX. A group interface will be
generated from the `IFACEWORDSLitheader`
list. Interface lists are usually, but
not always, associated with a *class group*.

```
\subsection{\texttt{litheader} Interface}  
  
'~{insert_interface_md_}~'  
)
```

```
NB. store markdown as a JOD group document  
2 9 put 'litheader';litheader
```

```
+-----+  
|1|1 group document(s) put in ->|aaa327403631806685638405507439206657280913|  
+-----+
```

```
[31]: NB. run jodliterate on group  
ltxpath=: 'C:\Users\john\AnacondaProjects\testfolder\grplit\'  
setjodliterate ltxpath  
{: grplit 'litheader'
```

```
+-----+  
|C:\Users\john\AnacondaProjects\testfolder\grplit\litheader.bat|
```

```
+-----+
```

```
[32]: NB. compile latex  
_250 {. shell ltxpath,'litheader.bat'
```

```
lar.otf><c:/program files/miktex 2.9/fonts/o  
pentype/public/lm/lmmono12-regular.otf>  
Output written on litheader.pdf (4 pages, 47726 bytes).  
Transcript written on litheader.log.
```

```
(base) C:\Users\john\AnacondaProjects\testfolder\grplit>endlocal
```

```
[33]: NB. uncomment to show PDF  
NB. shell ltxpath,'litheader.pdf'
```

Use Macro Overview LaTeX

```
[34]: NB. add a LaTeX overview - this code will not  
NB. be altered by jodliterate the suffix  
NB. '_oview_tex' is required to associate  
NB. the overview with the group 'litmacro'
```

```
litmacro_oview_tex=: (0 : 0)
```

```
This \LaTeX\ code will not be  
touched by \texttt{jodliterate}.
```

```
\subsection{Business Babel}
```

```
``Truth management is enabled.''
```

```
\emph{Excerpt from an actual business document!}  
Obviously composed in an irony free zone.
```

```
\subsection{Some Complicated \LaTeX}
```

```
\medskip
```

```

\[
\frac{1}{\Bigl(\sqrt{\phi}\sqrt{5}-\phi\Bigr)} e^{\frac{25}{\phi}} =\\
1+\frac{e^{-2\phi}}{1+\frac{e^{-4\phi}}{1+\frac{e^{-6\phi}}{1+\frac{e^{-8\phi}}{1+\dots}}}}
\]
)

NB. store LaTeX as JOD text macro
4 put 'litmacro_oview_tex';LATEX_ajod_;litmacro_oview_tex

```

```
+-----+
|1|1 macro(s) put in ->|aaa327403631806685638405507439206657280913|
+-----+
```

[35]: NB. run jodliterate on group
{: grplit 'litmacro'}

```
+-----+
|C:\Users\john\AnacondaProjects\testfolder\grplit\litmacro.bat|
+-----+
```

[36]: NB. compile latex
_250 {. shell ltxpath,'litmacro.bat'

```
e1/public/lm/lmsy6.pfb><C:/Program Files/MiKTeX 2.9/fonts/type1/public/lm/lms
y8.pfb>
Output written on litmacro.pdf (4 pages, 138976 bytes).
Transcript written on litmacro.log.
```

```
(base) C:\Users\john\AnacondaProjects\testfolder\grplit>endlocal
```

[37]: NB. display PDF
NB. shell ltxpath,'litmacro.pdf'

Using jodliterate with larger J systems The main `jodliterate` verb `grplit` works with single JOD groups. Larger systems are typically made from many groups.

JOD macro and test scripts are one way to work around this limitation. The JOD development dictionaries contain several macros that illustrate this approach.

```
[38]: od ::'joddev jod utils' [ 3 od ''  
  
NB. list macros with substring 'latex'  
4 2 dnl 'latex'
```

```
+-----+  
|1|buildjodlateX|buildjodliteratelateX|  
+-----+
```

```
[39]: NB. display start of macro that  
NB. applies jodliterate to JOD code  
250 {. 4 disp 'buildjodlateX'
```

```
NB.*buildjodlateX s-- generates syntax highlighted JOD source LaTeX.  
NB.  
NB. Files are written to the put dictionary's document directory.  
NB.  
NB. assumes: current versions of pandoc (pandoc 2.9.1.1 or later)  
NB. check noun (THISPANDOC
```

Final Remarks `jodliterate` is an idiosyncratic anal-retentive software utility; it's mainly for people that consider source code an art form. *Nobody likes ugly undocumented art!*

If you have any questions, suggestions, or complaints please leave a comment on this post. To include others join one of [J discussion forums](#) and post your queries there.

May the source be with you!

Better Blogging with Jupyter Notebooks on WordPress.com

Posted: 02 Jun 2020 00:48:09

When I discovered [Jupyter notebooks](#) a few years ago I instantly recognized their potential as a *technical* blogging tool. Jupyter notebooks support mixtures of text, mathematics, program code, and graphics in a completely interactive environment. It's easy to convert notebook JSON `.ipynb` files to markdown, L^AT_EX, and HTML so

it's not a big leap to use Jupyter as a *super-editor* for blog posts with heavy doses of code, mathematics, and graphics.

I converted a few simple notebooks into HTML and tried loading them to my WordPress.com blog; the [results did not amuse me!](#) Raw notebook HTML is not suitable for WordPress.com.

WordPress.com imposes some serious constraints on low cost and free blogs. You cannot:

1. Use arbitrary JavaScript.
2. Import standalone CSS styles.
3. Use non-standard plugins.

By setting up your own WordPress.org site or upgrading your WordPress.com account you can shed these limitations. I've considered both options but there's just something about software vendors teasing users with basic features while nagging them to spend more on upgrades that [gets my goat](#). I'm used to such abuse from the likes of Adobe and would advise WordPress.com to dial back upgrade nagging.

Fortunately, it's not necessary to upgrade your WordPress.com account to make excellent use of Jupyter notebooks. With a few simple notebook file hacks, you can compose in Jupyter and post to WordPress.com

Hack #1: nb2wp [Benny Prijono](#) has created a handy Python program [nb2wp](#) that converts Jupyter notebooks to WordPress.com oriented HTML. [nb2wp](#) uses [BeautifulSoup](#), (a great software name if there ever was one), and the Python utility [pynliner](#) to convert the HTML generated by the Jupyter [nbconvert](#) utility to a WordPress.com oriented form.

[nb2wp](#) HTML can be pasted, (read Benny's instructions), into the WordPress.com block editor. My post [Using jodliterate](#) was composed in this way.

[nb2wp](#) notebook HTML is treated as a *single* WordPress.com block editor block. This makes it hard to use the block editor which brings me to the next hack.

Hack #2: nb2subnb Notebooks are stored as simple JSON files. It's easy to split notebooks into n smaller notebooks. The following Python program, ([available here](#)), cuts notebook files into smaller sub-notebooks.

```
[1]: def nb2subnb(filename, *, cell_type='markdown',
               single_nb=False, keep_cells=[], keep_texts=[]):
    """
    (nb2subnb) splits out typed cells of jupyter
    notebooks into n sub-notebooks.

    examples:

    # split into n markdown cell notebooks
    nb2subnb(r'C:\temp\UsingJodliterate.ipynb')

    # split into n code cell notebooks
    nb2subnb(r'C:\temp\UsingJodliterate.ipynb',
             cell_type='code')

    # all markdown cells in single notebook
    nb2subnb(r'C:\temp\UsingJodliterate.ipynb',
             single_nb='True')

    # code cells with numbers in range as single notebook
    nb2subnb(r'C:\temp\UsingJodliterate.ipynb',
             cell_type='code', single_nb='True',
             keep_cells=list(range(10)))

    # markdown cells with strings 'Bhagavad' or 'github'
    nb2subnb(r'C:\temp\UsingJodliterate.ipynb',
             single_nb='True',
             keep_texts=['Bhagavad','github'])

    # all code cells in range with string 'pacman'
    nb2subnb(r'C:\temp\UsingJodliterate.ipynb',
             cell_type='code',
             keep_texts=['pacman'], keep_cells=list(range(30)))

    """
    with open(filename) as in_file:
        nb_data = json.load(in_file)
```

```

# notebook file name without extension/path
nbname = os.path.basename(os.path.splitext(filename)[0])

nb_cells, one_cell, nb_files = dict(), list(), list()

for cnt, cell in enumerate(nb_data['cells']):
    if nb_data['cells'][cnt]['cell_type'] == cell_type:

        if not single_nb:
            # single cell notebooks
            nb_cells, one_cell = dict(), list()
            if 0 == len(keep_cells) or cnt in keep_cells:
                if text_in_source(cell, keep_texts):
                    one_cell.append(cell)
                    nb_cells["cells"] = one_cell
                    nb_cells = insert_nb_metadata(
                        nb_data, nb_cells)
                    nb_out_file = NB_DIRECTORY + \
                        nbname + '-' + cell_type + \
                        '-' + str(cnt) + '.ipynb'
                    nb_files.append(nb_out_file)
                    with open(nb_out_file, 'w') as out_file:
                        json.dump(nb_cells, out_file,
                                  ensure_ascii=False)

        elif single_nb:
            # single notebook with only (cell_type) cells
            if 0 == len(keep_cells) or cnt in keep_cells:
                if text_in_source(cell, keep_texts):
                    one_cell.append(cell)
                    nb_cells["cells"] = one_cell

    if single_nb:
        nb_out_file = NB_DIRECTORY + \
            nbname + '-' + cell_type + '-only.ipynb'
        nb_files.append(nb_out_file)
        nb_cells = insert_nb_metadata(nb_data, nb_cells)
        with open(nb_out_file, 'w') as out_file:

```

```

        json.dump(nb_cells, out_file,
                   ensure_ascii=False)

    # list of generated sub-notebooks
    return nb_files

```

`nb2wp` can be applied to the sub-notebooks to produce smaller, more block editor friendly, HTML files. Blog posts can be put together by picking and pasting the smaller blocks.

Combining `nb2wp` and `nb2subnb` `nb2wpblk` combines the actions of `nb2wp` and `nb2subnb` to generate n HTML files.

```
[2]: # append nb2* script directory to system path
import sys
sys.path.append(r'C:\temp\nb2wp')
```

```
[3]: # notebook file
nb_file = r'C:\temp\nb2wp\UsingJodliterate.ipynb'
```

```
[4]: nb2subnb_opts = {
    'single_nb': False,
    'cell_type': 'code',
    'keep_cells': [2, 8, 21],
    'keep_texts': []
}
```

```
[5]: import nb2wput as nbu

# split notebook into selected parts and convert to HTML
nbu.nb2wpblk(nb_file, nb2subnb_parms=nb2subnb_opts)
```

```

Using template: full
Using CSS files ['C:\\temp\\nb2wp\\style.css']
Saving CSS to C:\\temp\\nb2wp\\tmp\\style.css
C:\\temp\\nb2wp\\tmp\\UsingJodliterate-code-2.html: 7054 bytes written in 4.488s
Using template: full
Using CSS files ['C:\\temp\\nb2wp\\style.css']
Saving CSS to C:\\temp\\nb2wp\\tmp\\style.css

```

```
C:\temp\nb2wp\tmp\UsingJodliterate-code-8.html: 4715 bytes written in 4.177s
Using template: full
Using CSS files ['C:\\temp\\nb2wp\\style.css']
Saving CSS to C:\temp\nb2wp\tmp\style.css
C:\temp\nb2wp\tmp\UsingJodliterate-code-21.html: 8683 bytes written in 5.437s
```

The utilities referenced in this post [are available on Github here](#). Help yourself and blog better!

GitHub's Silly Master Plan

Posted: 20 Jun 2020 16:39:20

The kids at [GitHub](#) have tested positive for Mad Woke Disease (MWD) - *again!*

The last outbreak was over [codes of conduct](#) this time it's about naming Git repository *master branches!* If you're wondering what's a Git *master branch* and why infantile *wokesters* are acting out I envy you. Perhaps you should stop reading now. MWD is a pathetic mental illness. It robs sufferers of perspective and judgement and often induces inane bouts of vacuous virtue signaling.

Still here - you were warned - let's dig into the tiresome technicalities.

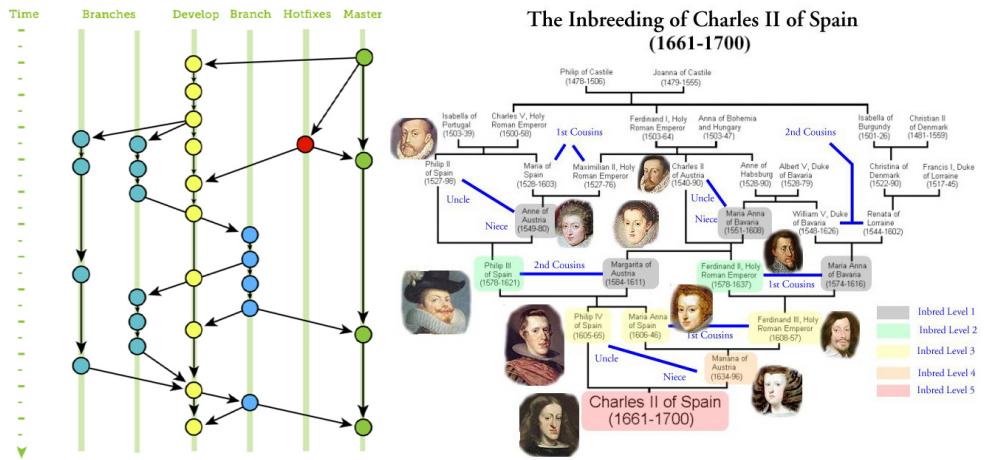
GitHub is a major website that hosts tens of thousands of [Git code repositories](#). Code repositories are specialized databases that track *program component* changes. The most commonly tracked components are source code files but other binary components like image files are also tracked. Code repositories make it possible for widely dispersed programmers to collaborate on large projects without *irreversibly* wrecking each other's work. Hence, GitHub and its [competitors](#), matter to software developers.

So what's this master branch?

Program code evolves like living organisms and just like relationships between organisms are shown on "tree of life" diagrams program relationships are displayed on repository branch diagrams. Complex programs have pedigrees that look like *inbred* royal family trees.

If you look closely at the left side of the next diagram you'll notice that the line of green dots beside the inbreeding graphic is labeled "**master**".

I know what you're thinking. How did white supremacists infiltrate the woke thinking



Images from: [David's Commonplace Book](#) and [endjin blog](#).

denizens of GitHub and embed racially loaded terms like “master” in code repositories? Obviously, wherever the word “master” occurs it’s referring to slavery and the brutal suppression of people of color⁸² because *words have only one meaning and context is always irrelevant*. To atone for their terminological sins GitHub is planning to rename the “master” branch something *currently* innocuous like “main”.

With all the shit plugging global toilets why did GitHub’s plumbers choose this silly turd to flush?

The use of the word “master” is a longstanding Git convention. Unlike other branches the master branch cannot be renamed. This is a minor annoyance and I support efforts to *allow* other words but having a fixed name for the master branch has advantages. It simplifies automatic program builds as they don’t have to determine what the master branch is called today. If the master branch is forcibly renamed it will break thousands of builds all over the world. Think of it as a digital black lives matter riot.

Here are a few rhetorical questions:

- If the “master” branch is renamed “main” will it fix racism?
- Will renaming the master branch demonstrably improve a single black life?

⁸²“People of color” is woke but the transposition “colored people” is not! The improper use of word order or pronouns is now a capital offense. First time offenders will be let off with a Twitter beating but if you persist, like some nagging *people of vagina*, it’s straight to the burning pyre for you.

- What will we call Chess Grandmasters⁸³?
- Must we rename Masters Degrees to Main Degrees?
- What about the Master's Golf Tournament?
- Or masterclasses?

And, it goes without saying, that we can never *master* anything, *in the sense of high achievement*, ever again because because it's clearly *woke racist*⁸⁴.

How Do You Check Your Vote?

Posted: 29 Jun 2020 17:35:45

How do you check your vote?

It's a simple question with a simple disturbing answer.

You cannot check your vote!

And when I say “you” I mean you. I don’t mean the system, the authorities, electoral officials, foreign auditors, or any third party. *I mean you - just you.*

There isn’t an electoral system on Earth that allows voters to check their votes. Americans cannot check their votes. Canadians cannot check their votes. Germans cannot check their votes. Indians cannot check their votes. The same holds for the British, the Japanese, the Koreans, the Australians, the French, and the Danes. Everywhere people cast ballots they are denied the means to *personally* check them. Amazingly, billions of people all over the world go through the motions of voting without demanding a rigorous system to check their votes and assess the integrity of their elections.

Well this is planet moron!

“Oh, come on,” cried Karen. “Surely you can trust law-abiding and well-ordered electoral systems to properly count ballots? And, aren’t you undermining the public’s confidence in the *democratic process* by demanding ways to verify votes? Are you a crypto-fascist? An Asian supremacist? A wife beater? Do you want the terrorists to win? Do you eat black puppies?”

⁸³Contrary to widespread woke opinion “Grandmaster” is not a KKK rank

⁸⁴Woke racism should not be confused with real racism.

Let's all calm down and look at the "checking your vote problem" with [Informed Naked Ape Protocol](#) (iNap) in mind. When you cast your vote *you are forced to trust the electoral system*. Informed Naked Ape Protocol has much to say about trust.

iNap #9: If you don't control it you cannot trust it.

I don't control the electoral system in the United States. I didn't control it in Canada either. *If you don't personally and absolutely control a thing you can never trust it.* I've voted in American and Canadian electoral systems and trusted neither because:

iNap #2: Trust is for imbeciles.

"Oh, John you're so negative, so cynical, so filled with bitterness."

It gets worse.

iNap #4: Assume corruption.

It's wise to assume that *any system you deal with is corrupt*. Corruption is the default state. Things are either innocently or intentionally fucked up until there are deep, open, and relentlessly verified scientific arguments to the contrary.

iNap #7: Practice relentless verification.

iNap #10: Only scientific and mathematical arguments are admissible.

How can I analyze the integrity of Idaho's electoral system? I would need unfettered access to state voter registrations, paper ballots, voting machine memories, and electoral officials. I would have to personally inspect every component of the entire system to pass judgment. I lack such access and so do you. Don't pretend otherwise. *You cannot verify the integrity of your electoral system.* Once again you are forced to trust and as I've said before and will repeat until my dying day:

iNap #2: Trust is for imbeciles.

It's time to stop *believing* in electoral systems because that is precisely what we are doing. We believe our systems are sound yet tolerate their inability to meet basic needs like personal vote checking. Would you *believe* your money was safe in bank that didn't let you check account balances? Well imbeciles, that's what you're doing when you vote! Belief in anything is a giant red flag because:

iNap #3: "Belief" is a bullshit word.

All modern voting systems are broken. Without a sound open source mathematically rigorous means of checking personal votes and verifying vote aggregates elections are

nothing more than cynical and insulting public relations spectacles “full of sound and fury and signifying nothing.”

Yes, Karen, all our electoral systems are broken but they don’t have to be. It’s entirely possible, indeed *technically trivial*, to create voting systems that:

1. Count only registered votes.
2. Permit voters to check their votes.
3. Allow full secure public vote aggregation verification.
4. Satisfy the highest standards of public disclosure and scrutiny.

iNap #6: Demand full analytic disclosure.

In the next few posts, I will outline such a system. We know how to do this; the creators of block-chains and public-key cryptography have already done all the hard work. We could have much better electoral systems up and running in months. Major obstacles are not technical; they are entirely political.

Tweaking Jupyter export HTML with Templates

Posted: 31 Jul 2020 22:34:35

In a [previous post](#), I outlined some handy hacks for converting Jupyter notebooks to WordPress.com oriented HTML. This addendum describes the use of [Jupyter templates](#) and CSS edits to fine-tune exported HTML.

Jupyter exports notebooks in a variety of formats. I regularly export notebooks as Markdown, HTML, and L^AT_EX. When blogging I mainly use HTML and Markdown. Standard HTML output labels code blocks with numbered prompts and indents text. The following [Rust hello world](#) program illustrates this layout.

```
[2]: // This is the main function
fn main() {
    // Statements here are executed when the compiled binary is called

    // Print text to the console
    println!("Hello World!");
}

main()
```

Hello World!

[2]: ()

For a few simple examples numbered indented blocks are fine but for longer posts, the redundant numbering and space-wasting indents grow tiresome. I used standard HTML output for [Using jodliterate](#) and around prompt In[7]: I was irritated with Jupyter's defaults.

Here's something you should know about me.

I don't like being irritated!

In addition to indented numbered prompts the standard format suffers from other [booboo](#)s when run through [Benny's](#) Jupyter to WordPress.com [transmogrifier](#). Markdown source code like `source` code `McCodeyFace` is set off in ugly blocks and any use of \LaTeX generates hideous inline images with nontransparent backgrounds like:

$$\varphi(u) = \int_{-\{\Omega\}} \left[\frac{\|\nabla u\|^2}{2} + \lambda \frac{u^2}{2} - \frac{(u^+)^p}{p} \right] d\mu$$

You can hack the background color of WordPress.com \LaTeX by bolting in a HEX color code suffix. This blog's background color is *currently* set to `cfcfdcd` so `\sqrt[n]{1+x+x^2+x^3+\dots+x^n}&bg=cfcfdcd` yields:

$$\sqrt[n]{1+x+x^2+x^3+\dots+x^n}$$

As far as I know, there is no global WordPress.com \LaTeX background color setting. You are forced to hard code the suffix into every expression and if you ever change your theme's background color you have to do it all over again.

Remember that bit about how I don't like being irritated?

Hard coding is euphemistically called a “[code smell](#).” In this case, it’s a foul stench. This isn’t Jupyter’s fault. Jupyter sensibly uses [MathJaX](#) to render mathematics with proper scaled outline fonts, but MathJax is an external JavaScript library and WordPress.com does not allow cheap peons like *moi* to drag in alien JavaScript libraries.

Side note to WordPress.com. Make an exception to your no JavaScript rule for MathJax. MathJax is a well established standard library and you're being pigheaded by not allowing it.

Some of these problems can be fixed with CSS tweaks, Jupyter templates, and `nb2wp` edits.

Tweaking Jupyter export formats You can adjust Jupyter export formats with templates. Templates modify how `nbconvert` transforms notebook JSON `.ipynb` files into HTML, Markdown, and other formats. Here's a good basic [introduction to Jupyter templates](#).

Jupyter templates are versatile and powerful but with “*great formatting power comes extreme annoyance.*” I don’t want to learn yet another programming language to tweak my fricking blog! Fortunately, it’s not necessary to get deep in the `jinja` weeds to remove a few block labels. The following template `tpl` file meets my meager needs.

A brain dead Jupyter template: `blankfull.tpl`

```
{% extends 'full.tpl'%}

## change the appearance of execution count
{% block in_prompt %}
  &nbsp;&nbsp;&nbsp;&nbsp;
{% endblock in_prompt %}

{% block prompt %}
  {% endblock prompt %}

{% block output_area_prompt %}
  &nbsp;&nbsp;&nbsp;&nbsp;
{% endblock output_area_prompt %}

{% block output_area %}
  {% endblock output_area %}
```

Save the preceding as UTF-8 text with extension `tpl` in Jupyter’s `nbconvert` share directory. The location of this directory will vary for different systems. On this Windows 10 machine it can be found here:

```
C:\Anaconda\share\jupyter\nbconvert\templates\html
```

Refer to `nbconvert` documentation to determine where to save `tpl` files on your system.

Stashing a custom template in the proper location removes block prompts and indentation but it doesn't fix CSS issues. The [CSS style file](#) distributed with `nb2wp` needs a few lines changed to prevent `MarkdownText` from getting a white background. The values after the line numbers on the left are the settings you need to give `CodeyMcCodeFace` text FRAGMENTS transparent backgrounds.

```
1077: background-color: transparent; background-color: #fff;
1529: background-color: transparent; background-color: #f9f2f4;
10126: background-color: transparent; background-color: #fff;
```

Finally, to control annoying L^AT_EX color backgrounds add another argument `bg_color_hex=''` to the the Python function `nb2wp`.

Running `nb2wp` with adjustments

```
import os
import sys

# append nb2* script directory to system path
sys.path.append(r'C:\temp\nb2wp')

import nb2wput as nbu

# set notebook files - the source for this blog post
nb_file_0 = r'C:\temp\nb2wp\TweakingJupyterExportTemplates0.ipynb'
nb_file_1 = r'C:\temp\nb2wp\TweakingJupyterExportTemplates1.ipynb'

# convert notebook with (nb2wp) using
# defaults for unspecified arguments
nbu.nb2wp(nb_file_0, out_dir=r'C:\temp\nb2wp\tmp',
          css_files=[r'C:\temp\nb2wp\style.css'], save_css=True,
          remove_attrs=True, template='full', latex="wp",
          img_dir=r'C:\temp\nb2wp\tmp\img', footer=False)
```

```
Using template: full
Using CSS files ['C:\\temp\\nb2wp\\style.css']
```

```
Saving CSS to C:\temp\nb2wp\tmp\style.css
C:\temp\nb2wp\tmp\TweakingJupyterExportTemplates0.html: 23132 bytes written in
7.650s
```

```
# convert notebook using tweaked CSS and custom template
nbu.nb2wp(nb_file_1, out_dir=r'C:\temp\nb2wp\tmp',
          css_files=[r'C:\temp\nb2wp\my_nb2wp_style.css'], save_css=True,
          remove_attrs=True, template='blankfull', latex="wp", bg_color_hex='cfcacd',
          img_dir=r'C:\temp\nb2wp\tmp\img', footer=False)
```

```
Using template: blankfull
Using CSS files ['C:\\temp\\nb2wp\\my_nb2wp_style.css']
Saving CSS to C:\temp\nb2wp\tmp\style.css
C:\temp\nb2wp\tmp\TweakingJupyterExportTemplates1.html: 57127 bytes written in
12.055s
```

Neowise Nostalgia

Posted: 03 Aug 2020 21:47:46

Comet Neowise is fading fast. For the last two weeks, I've been watching Neowise climb higher and higher in the early evening northwestern sky. Neowise was a welcome sight in this shit-storm (2020) year. Gazing at its diffuse tail takes your mind off the Wuhan Coronavirus⁸⁵ and the global, mostly self-inflicted, economic clusterfuck it caused.

In 16x70 binoculars Neowise was a fine sight; its bifurcated tail spanned the entire field of view but, without binoculars, Neowise was a dud for my cataract compromised eyes. Despite my best *averted-vision* efforts I never saw it without binoculars. So, as fine as Neowise was, it comes in last on my lifetime comet list. For a longtime amateur astronomer, my lifetime comet list is embarrassingly short. Here it is:

Comet Bennet 1970 near Canmore Alberta Canada

My first naked eye comet was a complete surprise. I was returning from a spring

⁸⁵I don't give a ding-dong-damn about whether you think Winnie the Chinese Wuhan Coronavirus is racist or not. The virus *cannot* care about what it's called, and neither should you. Ignore the *wokerati*; for them everything is racist. They've stripped the word "racist" of its meaning. "It's a beautiful thing, the destruction of words."

break Vancouver trip with two, now deceased, friends, Carl Sullivan and Lawrence Nazar. It was past midnight, we had just driven through Banff National Park on the way to Calgary when we pulled over to pee. While pissing on crusty highway shoulder snow we looked up at the mountains to the south. Shining high above the dark peaks was the most beautiful comet I've ever seen. At the time we didn't know the comet's name and we weren't entirely sure it was a comet. It was just too perfect! It looked exactly like a textbook comet. Later, another friend Bob Blaxley identified the apparition: [comet Bennet](#). We saw Bennet under nearly ideal conditions. The sky was pitch black and the comet was very high. The tail was spectacular.

Haley's Comet 1986 Edmonton Alberta Canada

[Haley's Comet](#) is easily the most famous comet out there. It's the one comet every literate person knows. Haley is a short-period comet. It famously returns every 75 to 76 years. Haley's human lifetime period distinguishes it from most comets. If you're lucky you can see Haley's Comet twice. Mark Twain often opined that he came in with Haley's Comet and expected to go out with it. [He did!](#) Contrast this with Neowise. It won't return for another 6,700 years. Nobody alive today will witness Neowise's return. Hell, even Bristlecone Pines, trees that can live up to 5,000 years, won't see Neowise again.

Some of Haley's passes have been spectacular. The 1910 pass was impressive, but the 1986 pass was a dud. In 1986 Haley's Comet was far from Earth and appeared as a small fuzzy tailless spot in Edmonton Alberta's skies. I'm glad I caught Haley's in 1986. I doubt I'll see it again in 2061.

Comet Hyakutake 1996 Kingston Ontario Canada

In 1996 we were all holding our breath as Hale Bopp approached perihelion. Hale Bopp had been discovered way out and we were hoping it would blossom into the bright enduring comet we craved. We had been bitterly disappointed before; we shall not utter [Kohoutek](#)'s name. With Hale Bopp on the way, [Hyakutake](#) was seen as a warm-up act. But, just like warm-up bands can out-play headliners, Hyakutake, the little comet that could, put on a great show.

On the week of Hyakutake's closet approach to Earth, I was eagerly looking for it but Kingston Ontario's crappy cloudy skies got in the way. Every night, for a week, I gazed up at the butt-holes of clouds not exactly the tail⁸⁶ I was looking for. The

⁸⁶How's that for *micro-aggressive* comet sexual innuendo?



Not the best posture for comet viewing but you have to respect the Nike product placement.

weather was grim, unrelenting, savage, cruel, relentless; it almost broke me, but then one night, as I was pulling into our driveway I looked up and saw perfectly framed in a cloud gap the long twisty filamentary tail of Hyakutake. The tail spread over twenty degrees. It was the longest comet tail I have ever seen. The following evening Kingston's skies clouded out and I never saw Hyakutake again.

Hale Bopp 1997 Kingston Ontario Canada

You could make a good case that [Hale Bopp](#) was the comet of the 20th century. Most naked eye comets show for a few weeks; Hale Bopp graced Earth's skies for over a year. Hale Bopp was easily visible to anyone that bothered looking up in 1997. It hung around for so long that we almost got bored⁸⁷ with it! As grand as Hale Bopp was it could have been beyond epic. Like Haley's Comet in 1986 Hale Bopp was very far from the Earth when it zoomed by, but unlike Haley's which appeared as a small fuzzy blob, Hale Bopp glowed like the much closer Bennet for months. If Hale Bopp had passed as close to Earth as Hyakutake had people would have lost their apocalyptic shit!

Some, too stupid to live, morons lost their apocalyptic shit anyway! Remember the [Heaven's Gate](#) suicide squad that boarded spaceship Hale Bopp with phenobarbital? I'll never forget their little [Nike](#) clad feet sticking out from under their purple death sheets. Ahh, good times!

Comet Neowise Meridian Idaho United States

Neowise is the last comet on my list. It didn't put on a grand show or inspire any suicidal death cults but I'll miss it anyway. Bon Voyage Neowise.

⁸⁷It takes a special type of asshole to be bored by a comet.