

CHRONICLE



2014

Andrew Woodmaker

A diary from the future? Or a dead man's work of fiction?

In this first year's worth of entries from a diary stored on a recording device found after a house fire in Nottingham, England, the beginnings of an expansive story are told.

Starting in 2014 Oxfordshire, the diary records the life of someone ordinary, a young journalist, seeking to make his way in the world, and recording his experiences as the world changes around him.

What starts off ordinary in 2014, becomes more extraordinary as the years pass, and ends among the stars.

Nobody knows if it is a work of fiction or a true record of how things happened, and will happen. By reading the diary, some things may have already begun to change, and the future is not what it was.

But it could be that this is how it would have been.

CHRONICLE 2014

by

ANDREW WOODMAKER

Edited from recording device by

Michael Simms

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Dedicated to my brain
which will *not* let me do nothing with my time.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Foreword

I found these diaries among the remains of a house in Nottingham that burned down in 2012. They were written on some kind of computing device that I've never seen before. It's taken me a while to extract the pages from the device, and get them into a normal format.

I don't know if they're a work of fiction. They may be someone's life's work and I'm stealing from someone who died in a house fire.

Or maybe they aren't. Maybe they're notes from the future. I don't know. The device was certainly futuristic enough. Some of the things these diaries describe are horrific, some of them amazing and wonderful. I don't know if I'll change things by publishing them, or maybe I'll bring these things to be.

I'm not a philosopher.

This is the first of a large number of years. I haven't even read them all myself. I'll be releasing them as I manage to extract them, one year at a time.

I've looked for information about Andrew Woodmaker, the supposed author of these diaries, and I can't find anything. Maybe I just don't know where to look.

If they're just a work of fiction, and I'm publishing the last work of someone that died, I'm sorry, I don't know what your name was, and I hope you don't mind my publishing them.

If this turns out to really be a diary from the future, I hope it can guide us to a better world.

Michael Simms
2013

Sunday, March 16th 2014

Congratulations on deciding to buy a copy of my diaries. Of course, you'll already know the life story of one of the most influential journalists in history, but you can now get to know my innermost thoughts as I climb the road to success and worldwide acclaim.

Well, OK, at least I hope so. I expect that really, this will start off as a diary I keep for about a month, and will end up as just a list of birthdays and appointments for the next year, before I chuck it in the bin. Lets face it, getting a job in the Didcot Gazette wasn't really my first choice of jobs after graduating, but I suppose it's better than the Sun. At least I'll be able to report on real stories, not just celebrities and their sex scandals.

I've been there a week now. All week last week I was being shown the rules, asked to read loads of previous editions so I knew the style of the paper, getting to know the ropes, that kind of thing. The paper is small, just twelve of us and that includes the receptionist. We don't even do our own printing, we just email files off to the Oxford Daily, and they do us a print run when they aren't printing their own paper. And then once a week we send off a few thousand papers for free delivery, mostly full of adverts, and lots of budgies get a new lining for the bottom of their cages. Still, it's not a bad group. The boss, Nigel Hawkings, seems a bit stressed and worn down, but then, when you're making budgie lining for a living, it's got to be hard.

I'm their first hire as Nigel - who insists on being on first name basis with all of his staff - tries to change the direction of the paper. Up to now, they've just reprinted whatever they think the locals will like that they can get from the Reuters news feed, and they'll buy stories from the Oxford Daily when they have anything good, but I'm their first real reporter. I'm supposed to go out, find the big local stories and turn around the fortunes of the company. No pressure then.

I must have done well at the interview last month, because they've given me pretty much carte blanche with what I choose to cover. Not being from the local area, that could be pretty tough, but I'll do my best to do a good job. After over 40 interviews, they're the only ones

to offer me anything and so either they're a bit desperate, or I was so good that my skills were beyond the understanding of the papers that didn't offer me a job. I'm believing the latter, and, of course, if you're reading my diary, I was either right, or you're snooping where you shouldn't be, Taima! :-)

It's late evening now, and tomorrow I'll try and see if I can find anything local that's going to rock the world in its significance, and expose it to the locals of Didcot in all of its glory. Or at least I'll try and find a lead on those annoying kids who're going round keying cars all over town.

Monday, March 17th 2014

Well, it *is* a good morning. Taima woke me up this morning in the best way a girl can wake up a guy, and I don't mean breakfast in bed :-) But now she *is* off making breakfast in bed, to celebrate my first day of actual work. It's a crying shame that even though she's only Muslim by birth and not really practising, she still gets uncomfortable making bacon, so it's gonna be a bacon free breakfast. And I think I hear footsteps in the hall so, away with the pad, time for food!

In the office

In the office now, just checked my emails, and discovered I've got lucky! An interview request had been accepted by a local company.

Late last week I'd sent out a load of requests to do interviews and tours of local interesting businesses - OK not so much a load as a handful, there isn't so much going on in the area that you could call it a load - and I got an email back from the one I really wanted, Reaction Engines. They're the guys who're making the new space engine. I have a tour and a meeting with the owner this afternoon. That gives me a couple of hours to quickly read up as much as I can on them so I don't seem like a moron when I get there.

Evening

Wow, busy day, and awesome, my first day as a real journalist. I'm glad the days of pen and paper are mostly behind us, I think my hand would have fallen off writing this all down. Simply videoing the whole tour and interview makes it a lot easier. I wish they'd acknowledged that back at uni, instead of making us learn the art of journalism as it was in the 1960's.

Anyway, yeah, the interview and tour. It was really interesting. The company is working on a new engine - a hybrid engine. A bit like in hybrid cars, it has two modes of operation, but this one is to go on rockets. No, not rockets, spaceplanes. They glared at me when I called it a rocket. It's called the Sabre engine, and it's a re-usable engine that works like a normal plane's jet engine up to about 26km, and then it turns into a rocket engine to push the rest of the way into space when the air gets too thin for a jet engine to work.

The big deal is that it will reduce the cost of space travel. You could be a space tourist for a quarter of the price that Virgin Galactic are charging, and you get to go all the way into orbit, not just a suborbital halfway job. They're a small company though, and I think that's going to be the heart of my story. They have an idea that will quite literally change the world, and they only have a small number of staff there. This thing should be huge. I think the story will be about government lack of vision and how many local jobs could be created if they would see the project for the real value it has. That's bound to go down well as a story. A bit of politics, a bit of science, local interest, and British excellence. Now I have a week and a bit till my first slot in the paper to write it. Oh and I have to get two more stories for that edition too.

I think I'm going to be a bit busy...

Wednesday, March 19th 2014

OK, so four days into this journal, and I've already missed a day. See, I knew it would end up as a list of birthdays and meetings. Right,

lets get this started then. OK, mum's birthday on April 6th, that's written in. Dad's birthday April 7th. There, now lets try and write something good!

OK, so despite missing Tuesday, I can promise it did happen. The world didn't just skip a day, it just got a bit busy, and I was tired when I got home. I'd spent most of the day writing on the Reaction Engines story, and to be honest, it didn't go well. I can't have writers block on my first professional story, that would be silly, so I assume that I'm just coming at this from the wrong angle.

So today, I dropped the story and had a meeting with the local police. The Didcot police force only has a small staff, and they don't even open on Mondays! Who ever heard of a police station closed on Mondays? In Coventry where I grew up, they're all open every day and night, but I guess that's the big city compared to small town England.

I got to the police station at about 11, not long after the morning fog cleared up, and had a chat with the duty officer on the front desk. He wasn't exactly rushed off his feet, so we talked about local issues for a bit. I gave him my number, and he promised to let me know if anything exciting was going on in town that the press should know about. I did the usual, told him that he'd get a mention in the paper if we printed any stories he gave us a lead on, stuff like that. It's technically illegal to offer the police money for leads, and since the new laws on press ethics were passed, well, I'm sure that the big papers still play loose with the law, but here at the Didcot Gazette, we play by the book.

I left at 1pm, when the police station closed for lunch. Yep, they close for lunch. What on Earth is going on here, do no crimes get committed between 1 and 2pm? Anyway, he had nothing too interesting to talk about really. No bank robberies in the town this week, no exciting crime at all, to be honest.

This may well end up being a problem. It's all well and good having complete freedom to report on anything I want, but if nothing happens in the town, how can I do a good job? Having only moved here two weeks ago, I just don't know the people or the places well enough yet. I just hope the boss - sorry Nigel - doesn't mind too

much.

I spent the afternoon wandering round town, chatting to local shopkeepers, giving out my card, telling them to call me if they had anything newsworthy to tell me about, or just to talk about the town, about anything they think could be interesting. Anything at all... Please?

Thursday, March 20th 2014

I'm writing this at lunch, a crab-stick sandwich from the local deli. I got a call this morning, from someone who'd seen my number after I'd left it in a shop window. Yes, I know, it's tacky, but I'm new in town, so I'm using short cuts. He wants to talk to me about a matter of 'extreme public interest'. I do hope he isn't wasting my time. He doesn't want to tell me over the phone, so he's either paranoid, or worried his story isn't interesting enough. Or possibly he's being hunted by MI5 and his phone is bugged and I'm in for the most exciting afternoon of my life. My guess though is that it's boring, but I'll hold out hopes for paranoid.

Evening

OK, yep, it was boring. But I think I'll write about it anyway as one of the three stories I need to do for next week's edition. The meeting was with a quite nice old guy, who spent a good amount of time complaining about the trees at the back of his house. I didn't realise that that *was* the story he wanted me to cover. The rail company wants to cut the trees down just past the end of his property, so they don't cause problems for the train line that goes just behind them. The track east of town is elevated on a bank, and they think the trees will cause subsidence in the embankment. I've seen news stories about this kind of thing before, so I guess it's a story to cover. Local interest, and I do need to report on what makes the local population tick, if I'm going to cover their news.

Late this afternoon, I laid out the outline of the tree story, ready

for writing. I've also made some good progress on the Reaction Engines story. It isn't where I want it to be yet, but I'm not hating it as much any more.

Saturday, March 22nd 2014

OK, so, here is is, my first completed story. I'll be handing this in to the editor on Monday morning. Taima has given me the evil eye for working today, but she understands that it's my first story for my new job. She's good to me, and I'll definitely make it up to her.

Railways ignore local protests

Despite overwhelming local criticism from residents of Didcot, First Great Western is planning to uproot hundreds of trees along the route of the Oxford to London railway line.

"It'll destroy the view from my back window," commented local resident Martin Brown. "When I look out of my window today, I can see lovely trees, all coloured leaves, birds nesting in them, but if the train company pulls them all up, all I'll see are dirty great intercity trains going past."

His sentiment seems to be echoed by many in the local community, with a petition so far gathering over 150 signatures from the town. Mr. Brown intends to join up with the action group from Cholsey and hand a combined petition from the two towns to management from First Great Western.

When contacted, First Great Western said that the work was needed to prevent soil erosion from critical rail infrastructure, and they had an obligation to carry out the work to ensure rail safety.

If you would like to sign the petition, please go to the online petitions site linked from the Didcot Gazette's homepage. You have until the end of next week to make your statement.

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So, that's it. The start of my illustrious career is - trees being cut down. Still, to be honest, I'm quite happy, I'm on the way!

Sunday, March 23rd 2014

I wasn't really going to cover my personal life, I was going to focus on my work, but it occurred to me, I can cut out bits I don't like, or don't want to publish, but it's much much harder to write detailed diary entries in ten years time when I won't have a clue what I did today. So, this evening, I'll spend a few minutes writing about what I did today, and if I keep it, I keep it, if I don't, well, you'll never know, will you.

Sunday evening

We spent the day at home, nice and relaxing, curled up on the sofa watching a couple of films. We watched the second Hobbit film again. It's nice to be able to watch 3D without the glasses now. My parents got us the TV last Christmas, no way I could afford it myself when I was still jobhunting, and it's so much nicer than going to the cinema where you still need the glasses.

After that we watched The Fifth Element 3D re-release. I do love that film, lots of sci-fi, some comedy, excellent. I just wish Chris Tucker's character was a bit less - well, just less. I know it's the part he was playing, but he goes a bit over the top and I think it spoils it a bit. Just a bit though, I still love the film.

We're going to head out to dinner now. Nothing too fancy, just Chinese food, we're still on a budget while I wait for my first paycheque, and Taima looks for a job.

Monday, March 24th 2014

Morning

Still very full of Chinese food from last night. Feel bloated. Ate WAY too much :-)

Afternoon

OK, feel better now. I've just been told by Nigel that I need to get all three stories in by the end of Wednesday for a Thursday print run, ready to go out on Friday. That gives me two and a half more days, and I need to finish one story and find a completely new one. Eeeeeek!

Evening

OK, so, it's evening now, Still no clue on the third story. I spent this morning scouring recent editions to try and find something worth following up on, and there really is nothing. I have one last idea, I'll try it tomorrow. Local poverty story, not pretty but, it is local, it matters to local people, and most importantly, will save my arse from failing to meet my first deadline!

Tuesday, March 25th 2014

So, here it is, my second story. I spent the morning interviewing people at the local job centre, about how they feel being unemployed, the economy, and how the austerity measures are hitting them. They were lined up in the fog, not much above freezing, and had a lot to complain about.

Destitute in Didcot

Didcot is one of the more affluent areas of England, but not everyone shares in its good fortune. Unemployment is low compared to many places in the country, but even here stands at almost 5%. When you compare this to Manchester (17%), Bradford (24%), and Luton (21%), it may seem trivial, but it isn't trivial to those who are living as a statistic day by day.

Since the new raft of austerity measures kicked in in 2013, unemployment has risen dramatically across the whole country. Government jobs that have been removed just haven't been replaced by private sector opportunities as the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition had hoped. And with a rising welfare bill, a shrinking economy, and a cut in investment, the triple-dip recession, as it has become known, seems set to continue to bring misery to local residents.

John Marsh, a bricklayer, has been unemployed for two years now. He lost his job due to the weakness in the housing market, and the continued low confidence in property has kept him and many others like him on the benefits line. "For the first six months I had a bit of savings, so I wasn't too worried, but after they ran out, I started looking for jobs doing anything. Even been rejected for street cleaning, because they had 60 applicants for one job. And it isn't worth doing odd days jobs any more. The new computer system the government has means that they automatically stop all my benefits even if I do just one days work, and then I have to fill in all the forms again, just to tell them I'm back where I was two days ago. Stupid it is, really stupid."

His sentiments were echoed by many standing outside the Didcot job centre at 8am in the morning, wanting to be first in, in the hopes of a prime job showing up. By 9:30, the queue had dwindled, and everyone had left looking disappointed.

Janice, who didn't want to give her last name, admits she often has to sleep rough since losing her job in a nail salon three months ago. When she lost her job, her boyfriend kicked her out, and with no savings to speak of, she has had to hope for the charity of a local homeless shelter, who are almost always full.

"In three months I've only got to sleep there twice. They give all the rooms to women with kids, and they never let me in, just cos I never got pregnant. How is that fair? I was sensible, so they leave me on the streets while those chavs get free food and beds cos they got themselves knocked up."

With the economy showing little sign of improvement, it seems that the unfortunate minority in Didcot will remain dependant on the state for assistance for the foreseeable future.

*

Not the most fun story to write. I don't like covering poverty and misery. I mean, who does. It is important though. We have one of the lowest poverty rates in the country here, and so people tend to forget that each individual has a story, everyone feels the cold if they don't have a roof, or even if they do have one if they can't afford heating. If I want to change the world with my writing, I could do worse than stories like this.

Wednesday, March 26th 2014

This is it, deadline day. I have till the end of today to finish the third story, the Reaction Engines one. I'm enjoying writing it, but there's a lot to cover. I know they won't make it a front page story, IKEA already has that one covered in a big advert, but I'm crossing my fingers for page three. OK, no, before you say it, we don't have *that* kind of page three in this newspaper! :-)

Evening

It isn't finished. I can hand it in by 9am tomorrow ready for editing and printing tomorrow night. Nigel was nice about it, I think he understands, it's my first week, and I'm new at deadlines. Lets face it, uni was a place we missed deadlines because we were too drunk to remember what the work was, let alone to hand it in on time. The worst we risked was a grade penalty, and the uni never wanted to do that, what with the league tables where they needed as many firsts as they could get to make them attractive to next years applicants.

I'll be up late tonight. Coffee is on, cans of Red Bull in the fridge, it's all-nighter time!

Thursday, March 27th 2014

It's done. No sleep since yesterday morning. I think I hear Lord Lucan telling me where he's been hiding all these years.

OK OK I'm not that out of it. I'm actually feeling quite alert. I know it won't last, and a lot of it is the caffeine, but really, it isn't too bad.

Just going to head into the office and drop off the article, and then back home to bed. I'll transcribe it when I get up.

Friday, March 28th 2014

It's very early. I'm using a keyboard instead of voice to record this entry, so I don't wake Taima. Our flat is only small, and she's a light sleeper.

So, the article is done, and probably right now is at the printers up in Oxford being printed into 4,000 copies of my writing. I'm hoping it hasn't been edited too much, although I know they'll have changed some things, after all, editors need to justify their jobs too. My editor is Debby Young, though she isn't too young, mid-40's I expect. Still, you know how it is, never ask a woman her age. Silly taboo if you ask me, but there is no way in hell I'm going to be the first to ask!

So, this is it before editing

Government holds out on innovative local company

The company Reaction Engines is no stranger to the people of Didcot and Abingdon. But what many do not realise is how small the company is. Working from a single unit in the Culham Science Centre, they are so dedicated to their work, that they make much more noise, and do more amazing things, than companies many times their size. The new Sabre engine they are developing is set to revolutionise space travel by dramatically reducing launch costs. The engine is hoped to be able to launch satellites and people into space for as little as 10% of the current price.

With their pioneering engine in the prototype stage, many have expected to see a new era of British space travel just around the corner. But yet the dates keep slipping. Two years ago, the prototype was hoped to be finished by now. Currently, the prototype is still at least eighteen months away.

“It’s a question of funding, mostly,” founder Alan Bond told the *Didcot Gazette*. “We’ve been promised financial assistance from the government, and from the ESA, but the money has trickled through very slowly. We’ve been attempting to obtain private investment, and while this has been a large portion of our funding, it’s proven harder than anticipated to obtain in the volume needed to make significant progress. Many of the big companies show an interest in the technology, but want to be able to control it before giving a large investment into its development.”

With the funding of the Sabre engine, and its vehicle, Skylon, looking to cost between £7bn and £8bn, this is a large amount of money to find from private investment. It is for projects like this that government investment is ideally suited.

The current climate of austerity, however, has led to many cutbacks in the funding of innovation. It has to be asked though, with a technology that could launch the UK back into the lead of the space industry, estimated to be worth around £150bn a year, why more investment isn’t being made to assist this local company. It doesn’t take a mathematician to realise this could be money well spent, and the benefits to the local economy could be huge, placing the south Oxfordshire area at the centre of a global industry, and creating hundreds, or more likely thousands of new jobs.

By time of publication, the government had not responded to our request for comment, and so we cannot say for sure why they are displaying such a lack of vision, but the damage to the local economy if this technology ends up overseas could be incalculable. A relatively modest investment here, now, in 2014, and within ten years, we could see a revolution in space technology that could not only put us back on the road to financial recovery, but it could really put the Great

back into Great Britain.

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That's it. I think I like it. I just wish I could have got a government comment before it was too late. It would have rounded the article off nicely.

Afternoon

Lunchtime, and the print run is back from Oxford and on the vans being distributed as I type this. There have been some changes, but not too many, I won't mention them here, after all, I'm sure that they'll be archived somewhere if you want to see the finished product. This is more about my personal account, the article I record here is the article I wrote, as I wrote it, unedited.

I haven't had time to sit on my backside all day though, I have a new exciting story to cover this afternoon. The local council is removing the traffic lights at the junction of High Street and Station Road, apparently to improve traffic flow, and locals are complaining about safety. Yes, I said exciting. The more I say it the more I believe it. Maybe.

Evening

Ohhh what a week, what a long and excellent week. I am home. I am done for the week. Adiós diary, I'll see you tomorrow.

Monday, March 31st 2014

You know, I've changed my mind. I think I'll spend more time focusing on the more important things. It's all well and good being thorough, putting everything down in my diary, but really, how exciting a read will it make to people who're going to be reading this in the future. OK, new plan.

Evening

Today was much more exciting, I bribed one of the local police to tell me about suspected corruption in the local force. I was given a file of papers to read that should prove that the corruption goes right up to the top of the Oxfordshire force. The chief constable's name is in there too, this is going to be huge! As I was leaving with the papers, one of the police who is named in the file put a gun in my back and had me hand them over. Little did he know I'd already emailed copies to myself. He let me walk away, thinking he was safe. Now let the story begin!

Tuesday, April 1st 2014

OK, OK, so yesterday was a complete and utter lie!

I didn't bribe anyone, I didn't get any papers, I've never even seen a real gun in my life, and if there is corruption in the Didcot police department, it stops for lunch every day. They just don't seem the type. I just wanted to spice things up a little. My stories this week about a traffic light removal, a dog being shaved bald by an angry neighbour, and horror of horrors, shortages of stock at the ice cream shop on the high street, just bored me to tears.

Yesterdays story is how life should be, lots of excitement and adventure. Maybe I'll write a book instead of a diary, a fiction book, about a spy, something like *The Spy who Saved Everyone* by Andrew Woodmaker.

Wow, that's a bad title. That's a really bad title. Let's not call it that. In fact, lets try and concentrate on the day job for now. Payday today, and the money didn't exactly set my head on fire with joy. I know it wasn't even a full month, but with living costs as they are, and taxes having gone up a couple of months ago - again - it didn't even reach £1,000. It's going to be tight next month. Most of my savings have gone on the move to Didcot, and with Taima out of work until she finds something, I don't think we'll be out having steak dinners every night, or clubbing in expensive clubs (I hate clubbing anyway).

Today I spent most of the day in the office working on the three stories for the week's edition. They're all complete, and I'm free to get a bit of a head start for next editions stories. No real clue what they'll be about yet. I was hoping by now I'd get a response from the government about the Reaction Engines story, but nope, nothing. If I don't get something soon, I'll send in a Freedom of Information request and ask what the reasons have been to justify not funding such a major project.

Thursday, April 3rd 2014

Whoops, I didn't get to record yesterday's events as I left my pad on the sofa instead of on the charger in the coffee table overnight. It was dead as a dodo when I went to use it last night. I'm looking forwards to the new batteries that were announced last year. Really long life, and should keep my pad running for a month on a single charge. Not bad, shame you can't buy them yet. The surface chargers are better than having to plug things in, just leave them on a charging surface, come back in the morning, it's done. But it's too easy, it makes it so much easier to forget to do it. Back when you had to plug in a cable, all of last year, you really knew you'd forgotten something when you didn't do it.

Anyway, yesterday was a bust, no new stories. I went into Oxford today to try and get some new juicy gossip, but I don't know my way round Oxford any more than I know Didcot - well, even less now I'm getting to know Didcot a little. To be quite honest, I spent about three hours wandering round the town centre, window shopping, trying to pick some things for my parents' birthdays next week. I got my mum a set of tea and coffee jars for the kitchen, I think she'll like them. If I remember correctly, I think they even match the kitchen!

Got home and Taima was a bit down, not sure why, she didn't want to talk about it. I suspect lack of job and money isn't helping. I bought a takeaway from the Chinese to cheer her up, and it seemed to help a bit, but she seemed preoccupied all night.

Friday, April 4th 2014

Got at least some story, more on the ever so exciting trees on the rail embankment. Caught a rail company engineer poking around up there. It was complete coincidence, I was walking back to the office, and saw one of their vans parked up, so I wandered over and had a chat with him. He said it was happening all over. They still aren't sure, but the big train crash last year, where 30 people died when a train left the rails at high speed and went down an embankment, they suspect that subsidence caused by tree roots was the cause. I said I thought that trees would make the embankment stronger, the roots would help to keep it all stable, but apparently not, although he admitted he didn't know quite why or how, his job was just to plan the chopping down to make sure no houses get squashed.

So, I'll write about that. It is fairly big news in a small town.

Saturday, April 5th 2014

Weekend, and I had a bit of an uncomfortable day. I finally got to the bottom of what was bothering Taima all week. Apparently she went out to the job centre, and was given some abuse by some of the local chavs. In a town with the demographics of Didcot, dark skin is a bit of a rarity, and they got a bit abusive.

I guess living in London for the last four years at uni, we'd kind of got used to people not really caring what colour her skin was, or that mine was white and didn't match. Small town Oxfordshire I guess isn't quite as evolved in some ways.

We talked about it, even discussed moving away from the area. Do we really want to live in an area where people have that kind of attitude? But, between us, more her than me to be honest, we decided to stay. It had to be her choice, if I'd tried to force the issue, well, we'd probably have stayed and she'd have resented it. That's never a good thing.

I've started to do pretty much the only thing I can do, I'm going to write an article about it. Not about her specifically, but about attitudes in predominantly white areas to non-white people. I expect I'll cause

quite the uproar, but I'm up for a fight over it. Not a fight fight, I don't do that - probably because the last fight I was in when I was a kid I almost lost an eye - but a verbal fight, a bit of controversy. Excellent.

Early night tonight, we're off to Coventry for my parents birthdays tomorrow. That's one of the best things about them having birthdays on adjacent days, only one trip needed. Still no idea of my dad's birthday present, I'll have to stop in town in Cov and pick something up.

Sunday, April 6th 2014

On the train on the way in. Taima just kicked me quite hard when I beat her for the fourth time in a row at noughts and crosses. I'm fairly sure she didn't mean it to hurt, and she felt guilty afterwards when she realised it really had. I'm probably going to be limping all day. Well, maybe, but even if not, I'll probably fake it, I can milk this for a while. She'll kick me again when she catches me, I expect, but it'll be funny. Of course, I'm typing this entry rather than voicing it, she's now sitting next to me reading, and she'd hear me, obviously. Her back is slightly towards me, and I think ribs can be tickled. Enough diary for now :-)

Evening

What a shitty - excuse my French - but what a shitty day. I'd picked up one of the new novelty ties for my dad, the ones where they've embedded micro-bubbles in the tie, and you can fill them with liquid and you suck the tip of the tie to get a drink from it. I thought it was amusing, and quite cool new tech too, you can fit almost a quarter of a litre in there before it starts to bloat.

Anyway, got to the house, and walking through the door I could feel there was a bit of tension between my parents. I didn't know what, but I just tried to ignore it. My mum made lunch, just some sandwiches, and no sooner had she given me a plate when she rounded on my dad, saying to look at the look on my face, how I

could obviously see it was cheap meat not proper chicken (I hadn't really paid attention or cared, I was too hungry for it to bother me) and how could he put her in that position. And so it all came out, he'd quit his job last week, big row with his boss, and stormed out.

I winced when I heard. In your 50s with no job right now is not a good place to be. The fight went on for a while, Taima and I just kind of sat there on the sofa feeling uncomfortable and trying to not get involved. Which was hard because, of course, when I got him a tie, and he no longer has a job to wear one at, yeah that wasn't good. Thankfully my mum still has a job, working at a local betting office, so not the best, but it's a job and right now, that's something to be thankful for.

As soon as it was polite to, we left, which made my mum cry because she felt she'd ruined our trip up, and my dad stormed off to the garage to do something else. The train trip back was quiet, we just sat and read, neither of us felt like talking much. Chocolate from the trolley helped a bit, but a sugar rush never lasts long when you're feeling down.

Monday, April 7th 2014

I told Nigel I'd work from home today, keep Taima company a bit, as she's had a crappy week. First the abuse, then getting caught up in my parents fighting, I felt I owed her.

We didn't really interact much over the day. She was online looking at job sites, trying to find a job within 100 kilometres of here (it was 50 last week), and me writing my article. I think she liked having me round though, and it was good to just have that companionable silence where you don't need to talk, but you know the other one is there.

I got the article finished, and I'll reproduce it here. I won't bother copying the junk articles into here, but I'll still import the ones I think are important. Not important in the grand scheme of things, but just, important to me, and they tell the story to you the reader, about here and now.

Variety really is the spice of life

Rural Oxfordshire is rightly one of the wonders of the country. Small towns, friendly people where everyone knows everyone, and a community spirit that is often lacking in today's fast-paced, and difficult world.

Every morning, the local stores open, and the regulars come in for their morning newspaper, or cup of coffee. They could download the newspaper onto their pads, but many don't even have them. Because change isn't always fast around here, and so sometimes we aren't the early adopters of new technology, or the first to try out foods from around the world at the local supermarket.

But we should always aim to be a community that is by us all, for us all. Even if we don't always set the trends, we have to move with some of the times, and that includes understanding that we are part of the wider world, and we can't always close it out.

It is reckoned that 90% of the population has lived here for at least two generations, and over half probably can't count how many generations, they would lose track in the mists of time. But new people do come into our community, and our community welcomes them.

As long as they are like us, anyway.

It is to our shame that our community isn't always as inclusive when it comes to people who are a bit different. Eastern Europeans who have come to England looking for a better life away from the struggling Eurozone countries are treated as scroungers, only good for cleaning floors even though it isn't unusual for a cleaner to have a degree in engineering, working way below their education level.

But their lot is more accepted than the small minority that dare to have different coloured skin. These members of our community, and make no mistake, they are part of our community, are ignored on the street, are served their coffee without eye contact, and have to hear

endless comments made behind their backs, deliberately just loud enough to hear.

It is natural. It is natural to be uncomfortable around people who are different. It's a billion year old part of evolution, we stick with those who are the same as us. It's what stops Lions and Tigers breeding until there are no more pure Lions or Tigers. It's what makes prey animals able to make microsecond snap judgements as to whether the movement they see is another of their herd, or a predator.

But we don't have predators any more, and we've evolved from the life of instinct and fight or flight. It is natural to feel uncomfortable around those that you feel are different, but as an evolved species, it is our duty to ourselves and our race to take the next step. When we feel uncomfortable around someone who may be black, or Chinese, or Polish, stop a moment, and think - 'This is a human, who has feelings like mine, who has goals and dreams, loves and fears, just like mine.' Accept and understand your instinctive distrust, and give that other person, from the group of 'others' a chance to show you that they too are just like you, and maybe we can all learn from them, as they can learn from us.

*

I think that says it as I feel it should be said. I've let Taima read it, and she isn't sure I'm taking the right tactic, thinks I should be more aggressively against the racism, but I tried to explain that I have to take their point and lead them gently to a new one instead of trying to kick them to look at their faults.

Bedtime.

Tuesday, April 8th 2014

Morning

Had a big big fight with Taima last night. Apparently her 'not sure I was taking the right tactic' meant 'you're a typical white racist pig, taking their side and leaving me out in the cold'. Great. I think three years with her proves I'm not racist, but apparently that's just not good enough, I should re-write the article or - well, she never said or else what, but I expect it wasn't nice.

I'm not going to rewrite it though, no matter how angry she is. I know I'm right, and she's wrong. She may have valid points, but she knows crap all about journalism.

Evening

Apparently I also know crap-all about journalism. My article was rejected, too wishy washy, not a topic that is right for the local news, I don't really make my point very well - well Nigel can kiss my arse, if he thinks his precious white-dominated community is all oh so perfect. What a twat.

I sent off an angry freedom of information letter to the government today, asking for details of the decision making on not funding the Sabre engine. I hate having to write snail mail, but even now the stupid government won't respond to even emails, let alone vmails, for most things.

As you can probably tell, I'm in a foul mood.

Wednesday, April 9th 2014

I spent today writing a bunch of bland articles for the boss, his high and mightiness. I looked for the most dull and boring and most conforming topics I could find. I handed them in smack on 5pm and walked out of the office without a backward glance.

Got home and Taima had made dinner. We've talked and we're good again. She saw I was angry with the boss, and I think it made her understand I really WAS on her side, I was just doing it differently than she would have. I'm a journalist, she's a teacher, you

have to be more direct sometimes when dealing with young kids, but when trying to change the opinion of adults, a bit more subtlety is needed.

I'm glad we're not fighting any more. I think I'll see how much forgiven I am when we head off to bed in an hour or so...

Thursday, April 10th 2014

The boss thanked me for the hard work on the new articles. He liked them. He especially liked the one about the problem of gum sticking to the pavements. He wasn't being sarcastic either. He actually thinks it's a good story. No wonder this newspaper gets given away for free if the final word on what gets published is given by someone that boring.

I dropped my mum a call, and she was all cheerful, as if the weekend problem had never happened. My dad joined in on his pad from the garage half way through the call, and seemed his usual self too. I hate it when they do that, pretend a fight never happened. I hate not knowing if they're really not fighting any more, or they're just faking it. I'll have to be careful what I say for the next few weeks, so I don't set them off again.

3pm

What the hell, it's snowing in April...

Evening

The snow finished by 4, and didn't settle. Shame, I do like snow.

Got home to the good news that Taima has an interview. With a school on the other side of London. Argh, not good. We could have stayed in London, and each had an equal commute, if we'd known this was going to happen, instead of me walking to work and her having a two hour commute. Assuming she gets it of course.

Friday, April 11th 2014

Just looked out of the bedroom window, and I'm working from home today. Thick snow is coming down. Absolutely covering everything, it must have started quite early in the night, there's about 30cm of snow out there, maybe more.

Mid-morning

In the office. The boss didn't want me working at home. 'If I can make it in from Oxford, you can make it in from four streets away'. Sure, but why did I *need* to, I'm writing today, and I'm pretty sure I can do that just as well at home as I can in an office, probably better as at home I can speak it instead of typing it in the office, where voice recording gets a bit irritating if everyone is doing it at once. I hate managers that just order employees to do something because they can, rather than for a real verifiable reason. Power trips, even small ones, really piss me off.

Evening

I wrote an article about the snow. It's stopped now, but it snowed heavily for most of the day, and it's probably at about 50cm now. I laughed my arse off when I saw the boss looking at his car, and then looking at the snow, and then looking at his car. I think he went to catch a bus from round the corner. So much for 'if I can make it so can you' - serves him right!

Extreme weather, just what the Chinese ordered.

The snow that blanketed Oxfordshire today was an unexpected treat for schoolchildren, and caught weathermen by surprise. While not as extreme a mistake as the hurricane back in 1987, with modern computers and satellites, it is rare for the Met Office to make such a large mistake these days.

The forecast had been for cold rain, but no snow. As such, no roads

had been gritted, no preparations made, and most of the county ground to a halt, with almost all schools closed for the day, and many companies remaining shut.

The Met Office confessed to completely dropping the ball, but blamed their error on the fact that, with the changes in climate that the world is predicted to experience, more of the same can be expected as weather models fail to follow normal patterns, and unexpected extremes such as this April snow become more and more common.

With China, the worlds largest polluter, having recently blocked a new UN resolution on climate change, we can expect more of the same for years to come, with unpredictable weather causing disruption both locally and around the world. The Spanish drought, now in its seventh year, is a prime example of this. While in some ways, the UK has benefited, with Scottish and Welsh companies exporting bottled water to Spain, days of snow causing shutdowns across the country will more than offset the economic benefit we have seen from those industries.

It had been the hope of global environmental groups, that with China's five year drought in their Yunnan province, the country may be more willing to accept UN proposals for emissions limiting, despite the slowdown that China's economy would suffer because of them. However it seems that China has leaders no more able to look beyond tomorrow than anywhere else in the world.

With more snow on the way, don't put your wellies away yet!

*

I don't like the end, don't put your wellies away yet. It's a bit weak, even if a little (very little) amusing. I'll probably change it. Maybe something more dramatic - "With more snow on the way, who knows where this will all end" - no, too dramatic. Maybe "With more snow on the way, children are bound to get in lots more sledging time before they have to go back to school."

Yeah I like that one better, OK, I'll change it to that.

Monday, April 14th 2014

Got into work this morning to find I had a review, first month's performance. It went - OK. Not brilliant. The boss said I needed more experience (well duh, it's my first reporting job), and some of my stories were a bit basic, but overall, he was happy to keep me employed. Which is a relief because otherwise we'd be really stuffed financially.

He said I needed to spend some more time reading the styles of some of the big name reporters online and in print. I held my tongue and didn't mention I've just spent four years at university doing just that, and promised I'd do it. I held my nose and bought a couple of tabloids on the way home. I really don't aspire to be a reporter in one of them, but for a small paper to step up, it probably needs to head that way. More controversy, more nudity, and way way less facts. I threw the tabloids away pretty quickly, I don't care if I end up fired, I'm not turning into that kind of reporter. Real stories, and if he doesn't like it, well, I guess I'll just find a better job.

Before bed

After repeating my rant where Taima could hear it, I fished the papers out of the recycler, and read them some more. I don't want to talk about it.

Wednesday, April 16th 2014

Writing in the evening

I'm not a great cook, but I made dinner to celebrate Taima's interview, for when she got back from London. She thinks the interviewer was apparently a bit vague and disinterested, so it's possible they've already chosen someone else. A bit rude if that's the case, letting someone travel two hours to go to an interview they have no chance of getting, but who knows, maybe she read them wrong. Still, even if it didn't go brilliantly, it's interview experience, and

maybe it went better than she thinks.

Thursday, April 17th 2014

The last of the snow has melted. Not surprising as it topped 25 degrees today. There are still way too many people that have been suckered in by the climate change sceptic lobby, but thankfully less and less as time goes on. I just hope it's in time to fix what we're breaking :-)

Friday, April 18th 2014

I probably shouldn't have been in work today, it was a bank holiday after all, but I needed to get some work done, so, I trudged my way round the the office.

I was glad that I had, as I'd received my Freedom of Information reply from the government in the post this morning. Combined with a phone call I had with Reaction Engines afterwards, is definitely good for a follow-up story.

Dear Mr. Woodmaker

In reply to your letter dated the 8th of April, regarding the funding of the Reaction Engines product 'Sabre Engine'.

We have taken a keen interest in this project, and have a funding structure in place worth £20 million. This is dependant on various milestones being reached, which has resulted in £3 million so far being provided to assist the Reaction Engines company achieve its goals.

However we would draw your attention to the current economic climate, in which it is obviously the priority of the government to provide basic services for the public, instead of spending on projects that, while interesting, have only limited financial potential to provide

a return on investment for the treasury.

Yours sincerely,

Tom Booker
Second Permanent Secretary, HM Treasury.

*

I thought it was a bit brief, but then I spotted the sender, the second permanent secretary. That's a bit strange, that's the number two in the whole treasury, who's in charge of international finance. Why on Earth would he personally reply, and why him? Surely it's domestic finance, nothing to do with international. Maybe it was nothing to do with him and some intern used the wrong rubber stamp, but it would explain the brevity of the reply, he would be a fairly busy chap. It's been signed in pen though, not stamped, you can see it has the pressure of a pen on the paper.

Anyway, so I called Alan Bond over at Reaction Engines, and he was a bit surprised, as they've been given no milestones for finance release, and had just been told that the funding was held pending an investigation into feasibility. Which itself made no sense as there had already been an ESA feasibility study completed, and a second by the University of Leicester. Both had given it a thumbs up.

So, Monday I'll get onto a new story about it. In the meantime, I spent some time over at the local hospital today, talking to them about their new next generation MRI machine they've just installed. It's supposed to be 10% quicker than the standard MRI, and only half as noisy. I doubt anyone's socks will be blown off by that news, but it can obviously mean the difference between life or death in an emergency sometimes, so, it's a good thing, and newsworthy.

Tuesday, April 22nd 2014

Two stories done today, quite pleased with that. I expect it's something to do with being extra-sugared, after eating a ton of

chocolate for Easter, I just worked like a boss all day and it all just fell together.

The first article, the MRI one, which is a bit dull, quite technical to dazzle the locals with science, was fairly long, as it was quite a big investment for the hospital. The second one, the one I like though, is the new Engine story. A bit of controversy I feel, or just so obvious that the government has no clue.

Government Mismanagement on Reaction Engines

The Reaction Engines company, based in the Culham Science Centre just outside of Didcot, is well known locally for its pioneering space engine project, and was the subject of a recent Gazette article.

New information from the Treasury Department has indicated that while they seem to be willing to offer some small amounts of funding, to the tune of £20m out of a £7bn development cost, they are so wrapped up in bureaucracy that even this may never happen.

While this may come as a surprise to precisely nobody, it is shocking how such mismanagement can affect local companies. Currently, £17m is being held back by the treasury based on inaccurate information, and based on Reaction Engines meeting goals they have neither been told about, nor consulted on, making them likely to be arbitrary at best.

With the Government's position of asking for Reaction Engines to meet unknown project goals, while telling the company that they were dependant on reviews to be carried out by the ESA and other bodies, that have already been successfully completed, it seems that the government needs to meet with management from the company to straighten out misconceptions. Company management have reported that a high level meeting has been scheduled for the beginning of 2015.

Waiting until 2015, over eight months away, would sink most companies in desperate need of investment, but luckily Reaction Engines is used to performing great feats with small budgets, and

have promised that they will continue on, regardless of the obstacles. They have the ethic of resilience, and of unquenchable drive, that is typical of the great British underdog company.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the Atlantic, the US Air Force has announced a new date of May 11th for further flight tests on their scramjet engine, which is designed to perform the same kind of task as the Sabre Engine. With the US military never seeming to have funding problems, it shows even more the bravery of our local industries willing to develop a competing product to such a behemoth of industry.

*

I know I'm going to get edited to hell about some parts of this, but it's how I want it to look. The neutered and politically correct version will no doubt be conforming, polite, and non-offensive, and probably government sanctioned. Still, that's what editors are for, to make my stories acceptable for consumption, the blander the better.

I've sent some letters off to the people CC'd in the Freedom of Information response. They mainly seem to be just government departments, junior civil servants, that kind of thing. I thought I might as well, just to see if they have anything to add. If they've been CC'd it may have been for a good reason, though I expect mostly it's just a list of anyone who could possibly be remotely interested in it, plus many people who probably have no idea what it's even about. You can't beat the government for generating needless paperwork.

One of the CC's I can't find, a general whose name doesn't show up anywhere in the military records. Probably a typo or something, so I'm not going to worry about it.

Thursday, April 24th 2014

Yep, I got edited. The boss said he wanted me to stop covering the Reaction Engines story, because I seemed to be too biased.

He's right, I am, I'm biased towards a company that deserves success, and against government mismanagement. I don't see a problem with a reporter for a local paper sticking up for local interests. I tried to argue the point, but he wasn't having it. Isn't covering local interests what we're supposed to do?

Taima is off on another interview today, this was a short notice one, she only got a call about it yesterday. It's a late one, so I'm having dinner from the chippy.

I've been reading through this lot, and I think I'm going to change format again. I've been skipping a lot of personal life stuff, focusing on some less than stunningly exciting things, to try and get a daily entry. If my diaries are going to be a worldwide phenomenon into the life of a world-famous reporter, I think I'd like to not put readers to sleep with 128 days in a row of yawnish articles about trees being cut down and traffic lights, just so they can get to the good stuff that happens occasionally.

I'm going to go to doing one entry a week for now. If something extra cool comes up, I'll add in supplemental entries. Hah, I sound like a starfleet captain. A supplemental log. Sorry, I amused myself there.

Friday, April 25th to Friday, May 2nd 2014

First day of the new format. Well, week I guess. I could almost have done a few good single day entries this week, but, let's see how this format goes.

On Saturday, Taima got a letter telling her she hadn't got the job in East London. I think neither of us are surprised, or really too disappointed about it. A two hour train trip each way five times a week would be murder. She was still a bit down about it, it's never nice to be rejected, especially by form letter. I should know, all those reporting interviews I didn't get jobs from, and at least half of them bothered to tell me they didn't want me. The other half, I just assume

desperately wanted me to work for them, but their motorcycle couriers delivering my urgent acceptance letters, were all killed by the swarms of marauding lions that roam South London... or something.

On Monday I was called into the bosses office again. I thought I was being fired, but he broke his frown to tell me he was really pleased. The Oxford Daily had called and asked to have the original articles from my two Reaction Engines stories, and were going to reprint them in their paper. Only the second time that the Daily has ever been interested in anything we wrote. And they're paying us for it, so yay, I've earned my bacon for the week.

Speaking of bacon, payday came again, hooray! Seven pounds from our overdraft limit, and the money goes in, what a relief. This time a full months salary, and I think we'll just scrape by. No train trips to Coventry this month, no birthday pressies to buy, we may even be able to afford to spend a little money, but I'd like to get out of the overdraft first I think. After all, it doesn't do for a reporter to be in debt. That makes us prime candidates for bribery. You hear that everyone. you can bribe me, offer me lots of money to print scandalous stories about people you don't like! Anyone, please, bribe me!

I spent a day up in the offices of the Oxford Daily. I didn't mention they'd rejected me when I interviewed with them (the day before the Didcot interview), and I doubt they remember me. The guy that did the interview was the same editor who went over my story and notes and was turning it into the format their paper uses. I have to say I liked the way they worked, the story came out much better than the first one did. I guess that's why they cover a whole county, and we cover the bottom of budgie cages for 4,018 copies. Nice guys, even bought me lunch. I came really close to asking if they have any job openings. I could enjoy working at this place, but I didn't say anything in case word got back and put the job I do have at risk. Yeah some may say it's the cowards decision but I prefer to call it 'playing safe'. And if you don't agree, you can fight the person I nominate to fight in my place :-)

An interesting thing happened though, and I got a bit of a surprise.

The editor, when they read the Freedom of Information reply, was pretty surprised to see it came from so high up in the Treasury department too, and said they'd like to do some of their own research, if I didn't mind. They actually asked if they could follow up on my story instead of just stealing it, very professional of them. I said of course not, but I'd like to get copies of anything they find for the Didcot Gazette. They agreed right away.

The surprise came later in the week. The unknown CC on the Freedom of Information reply, the missing general, actually does exist. I'd gone to the armed forces register to find them, which was my mistake. What I should have done was just go online and use a generic search engine. Apparently this isn't a British army general at all. It was a US Air Force General.

Why on Earth would the government CC a US Air Force General on a Freedom of Information letter, what's it got to do with them? This is actually turning out to be a bit of a mystery. OK maybe I'd love to see a conspiracy theory, it would certainly do my career no harm to find something strange going on and to report it, but it's all very odd. I'm sure it will come out that it's just routine, but I can't see how. Probably cos I can't see why it wouldn't either, but that's another story.

The editor at the Oxford Daily also had no idea either, but promised to let me know if he got anything juicy.

On Wednesday I got a letter forwarded from my old address, dated three months ago, offering me a job at a paper in Birmingham. Thanks Royal Mail, good job. It wouldn't have been a better job than this, but it would have been three bloody months ago, and that's about an extra months worth of salary. Not to mention it's damned expensive to live down here, and Birmingham is pretty cheap.

Saturday, May 3rd to Saturday, May 10th 2014

I've been learning all about financial markets this week. Greece has just withdrawn from the Euro. To be quite frank, I'm not too up on finances, banking, and international trade, but I'm learning

quickly. Basically Greece has just announced they will leave the Euro at the end of May, go back to their old currency, the drachma. It isn't a huge surprise. Even knowing little about the details, I've seen people talking about it on TV for years, and how it would be bad for the Euro.

Bad for the Euro, well, it isn't like the Euro has been doing too well recently anyway. Germany in recession for five quarters, France for seven, they're the two biggest Euro economies, and their recession has meant that the Euro has lost 20% of its value in the last 18 months.

Hey, do I sound like I know what I'm talking about? Yeah, that's Wikipedia. I know, I know, it can't be trusted as authoritative information, but they provide sources and they get me what I need. It isn't like I'm going for a job as Governor of the bank of England, I'm writing for a small paper that will never be read by anyone, let alone anyone who matters.

The Drachma is back again

This week's shock announcement that Greece was leaving the Eurozone after years of failed austerity policies has been greeted with dismay by other Euro countries. The German finance minister has been meeting with the Greek ambassador to Berlin, in an attempt to reverse the decision, a move described by the ambassador as "idiotic, it's like they think we didn't think about this, and just woke up one morning and thought, hey lets leave the Euro. It isn't something they can have a chat with us about and change our minds, it is a carefully made decision for the better future of our country".

Such strong language in diplomatic circles is surprising indeed, bringing back memories of the Polish ambassador to the EU, who when explaining why Poland should have more population linked votes in the EU assembly, stated that If it wasn't for Germany 60 years ago, Poland would have a much higher population.

The loss of Greece to the Eurozone is financially minimal, comprising of only 3% of the size of the economy. The real problem is of perception, and concern that others may follow. If people believe that,

for example, Italy could be next, then that would be a significant blow to confidence in the Euro, causing panic currency selling, and severe damage to the economies in the Eurozone.

Ironically, although their weak economy is the main reason for their pull out, Greece has now insulated itself from any direct fallout from the Eurozone, and with direct control over their finances again, they are likely to have a better chance of bringing their country back to competitiveness, although repayments of loans to the EU will still be causing hardship for the country for decades to come.

The effect on the British economy should be small. Greece is not a major trading partner with the UK. Only if the Euro becomes weaker due to this event would our own economy suffer, as it would be more expensive for Eurozone countries to purchase British goods.

If you hold funds in Greek banks, your Euros will be worth 3.41 drachma each. This puts the new drachma as worth around 100 of the old drachma, and means that Greece has at the same time re-valued its old currency to get rid of the large denominations it used to need.

*

I think that sounds quite knowledgeable. So evidently did my editor, who I expect just didn't want to have to do any research herself, and so let the story through almost untouched!

Sunday, May 11th to Saturday, May 17th 2014

The news this week has been full of Germany and Greece yelling at each other. Germany threatened to recall its loans to Greece, and Greece's German ambassador responded they'd need to come in tanks to collect. That was pretty scary talk, but the Greek president came on TV shortly afterwards to calm things down, and to fire his ambassador to Germany for being a bit too loud mouthed. To be honest I think I saw the presidents mouth twitch when he made the

announcement and he secretly approved of what had been said, but he could never admit it.

On the home front, Taima has had two more job interviews, and two more rejections. I can see that look on her face, kindof like the one I always had when I didn't get a job. I feel guilty as hell, she had a job before we moved to Didcot, and quit it when we moved. It was in West London, and she's gone for other jobs now that are further away. I'm doing my best to be supportive, but the line between supportive and patronising is a fine one, and I think I may have stepped over it a couple of times. We've had a big fight this week again, about - you know, I don't actually know what it was about. I was just the bad guy and it was all my fault, and everything I've done in the three years we've been together has been crap. How is it that every woman on the planet seems to remember every single little thing we do wrong, and never forget it? Even years later, they can bring it up as a huge tragedy, even when you can't remember the event even happening, and I'm expected to apologise for it. Again. I just don't get it.

We've been on basic communication only for two days now. I guess I'm expected to apologise for something, but she won't tell me what. I guess I should start at apologising for my own birth, and work forwards through all of my memories, I expect I'll get it right eventually.

The only other thing of note this week is that I heard a load of noise at the back of our flat, coming from a few streets away. I rushed out with my pad, in case it was something exciting, and found the train company cutting down all the trees on the embankment. You remember the story from a couple of months ago, my first ever story? Well, I guess I'm doing a follow up to it next week for local consumption.

Sunday, May 18th to Saturday, May 24th 2014

There were quite a few people protesting against the tree cutting, but nothing too exciting. I was hoping to see someone climb the trees,

or chain themselves to them, but no, just shouting and some placards. Nobody even threw anything. So much for an interesting story there. I did a write up of it anyway, and the boss liked it. It was just dull enough for him, while not being too dull that my editor would slap me around for it. Oh the fine line I walk sometimes.

Taima finally came out of her sulk - though if she hears me call it that I can expect a nuclear sulk to happen - and we're on talking terms again. No idea what I did, probably never will know, which I don't like, but I'm pretty much stuck with not knowing and I'll take that over the cold shoulder any day.

It seems that the whole south of Europe is shouting at Germany right now. Italy has promised to assist Greece in its transition, and, in diplomatic terms, told Germany to shut the hell up. I saw a bit of the UK reactions on the BBC, and the politicians here are lapping up the problems in the Eurozone, although the Lib Dems are looking a bit green, being all pro-Euro as they are. The Conservative MPs are all patting themselves on the back for not giving us a referendum on joining the Euro, even though a few weeks ago they were all in favour of it. Do they *really* think we're a big bunch of goldfish and we'll forget that so quickly. Don't get me wrong, I'm pro-Europe, as it's kept us all from fighting in more than words for quite some time, but I don't like a lot of what they do, so I end up on both sides of the argument. I suspect a lot of people are like that.

By the end of the week it had settled down to Germany, and to an extent France, glaring at Greece and Italy over the edges of their glasses at the EU government forums. They were still talking, but the civility was heavily undertoned with sniping and sarcasm. I especially liked Italy's snide comment that Germany should be careful with France on their side of the argument, as it would likely doom them to defeat.

Sunday, May 25th to Saturday, May 31st 2014

It's been a quieter week this week. I think Greece just decided it

had better things to do than waste time sniping at Germany, and actually got down to doing some work on the new currency. I discovered, interestingly, that with the Greeks having been in the Euro for so long, they have no currency production facilities, and the new batch of Drachma are being printed in south Wales at the Royal Mint. That'll be good for a few hundred jobs that the country desperately needs. The new unemployment figures are out next week, and I don't think, from what I'm seeing, that they'll be great news and an excuse to hold nationwide street parties.

We spent Wednesday evening in London for Taima's dad's birthday. I always feel a bit uncomfortable there. They're very devoutly Muslim, and while I don't advocate any kind of racism, they do make me feel a bit uncomfortable. However that's a problem for me to resolve, not them, I should be able to accept people as who they are, no matter if they're different. It's difficult though when they break off a conversation for prayers, I feel like I'm intruding, and I'm unwelcome in the house. I'm sure that - possibly - isn't the case, but that's how I feel. They said many years ago that they weren't happy with their daughter being in a relationship with a non-Muslim, but I guess they were at least happy that I have no religion, rather than a competing religion.

At the end of the week, the tree cutters from the train company were done, the crowds dispersed, and life returned to normal. I had a chat for the final follow up with the guy I'd talked to first that started off my coverage of it all, and he was really unhappy, reckons it's knocked £20,000 off the value of his house. He's going to be asking for compensation from First Great Western. I wished him luck with that, with as little pessimism in my voice as I could manage. I think he has as much chance of getting compensation as he has of finding a bag of magic beans and re-growing all of the trees by the end of next week.

Sunday, June 1st to Saturday, June 7th 2014

Last week was quiet, I should have known this week wouldn't be. I'm just going to copy in my article on what happened.

Old people now too expensive to help

On Monday, the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government announced they would, with immediate effect, stop winter fuel allowance payments to the elderly members of the population.

The allowance, worth £300 to each person over the age of 60 to help them to pay for fuel bills, had been credited with saving the lives of hundreds of elderly people every year. The saving of £4 billion a year will of course go a long way towards assisting the economy, but what about the elderly people left to shiver in a single heated room in their house.

Well, the answer comes later in the bill. The new law will require electricity and gas companies to take up the slack, and provide discount fuel to anyone over the age of 60.

The utility companies have reacted angrily to this offloading of the responsibility for Britain's 12 million elderly people onto them, with supplier EDF claiming that it was "a shocking breach of trust, and irresponsible to pass such large expenses over to the private sector without even a consultation".

Obviously, with the new employment figures showing a rise to 16.2% unemployed coming out on the same week, the saving of £4bn annually will balance the increased benefits payments to the unemployed, and keeps the governments 2013 pledge of matching each increase in spending with a corresponding cut in services or increase in taxes. Cutting the winter fuel allowance, however, is guaranteed not to be a vote-winner for the government.

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Of course, it's obvious even to the stupid what'll happen. The

utility companies will simply raise the prices to everyone else so they can cover the new mandated price reductions. They won't lose a penny, the government will save £4bn, and the money comes out of us. The problem of course, is that the rest of the economy will lose £4bn elsewhere. The money we would've spent at restaurants, or buying new shoes, or who knows what else, will now be spent on fuel bills.

Taima got a few days temp work this week, covering a sick local teacher for the latter half of the week. It was nice, she seemed so happy to be working, even if the kids were apparently, and I quote, 'A bunch of little bastards.' She still seemed to enjoy it, and her mood is a million times better. It's amazing the change it can make in someone when they find work, and can provide for themselves. Just a bit of self-respect and confidence, and they perk right up. She's like a different person. It won't last, as it's just temp work, but it's so much nicer to have her around this week.

Greece's new currency launched to much fanfare, and immediately dropped right into the toilet. They'd launched it at a value that made their economy the same size it had been under the Euro, and it seems investors didn't think it was worth that much. In fact the value of the new Drachma dropped by almost half in the first few days. It's looking really bleak over there. With the halving of the value of its currency, it's effectively doubled the value of Greek debt, which was crippling their economy anyway.

The opinion pieces I've read throughout the week indicate that the biggest problem that Greece has is that many people there feel that paying taxes should be optional. If all of the taxes that should be paid were paid, then the economy would be about 30% larger, and a whole lot healthier. The inability of the Greeks to get their tax collection under control has been their biggest problem for the last fifteen years, and unless they manage to fix it quickly, they'll end up in even deeper trouble than they are now.

Sunday, June 8th to Saturday, June 14th 2014

At the start of the week, Greece dominated the news again, there were riots in Athens because of inflation, people had seen a good portion of their life savings wiped out in a week. Inflation hit five thousand percent at one stage. The government has promised it's just a temporary setback, and the currency is rebalancing itself to international markets. I don't think anyone was listening. The only people who seemed to be doing a roaring trade were the petrol stations, who were selling the fuel people were then using for petrol bombs in the riots.

Wednesday this week was Taima's birthday. The boss tried to make me work late changing one of my articles, and I refused. I thought he was going to blow a fuse, and he said 'we'd discuss it later'. I don't care what he says, nothing he could do to me would be as bad as being late home on Taima's birthday, really!

We went out to dinner, then to the cinema to see an advance screening of the new How to Train your Dragon 2 film, which is due to come out in a couple of weeks. Perfect timing for her birthday, the first UK showing. I thought it was almost as good as the first one, which we'd both liked. For a pressie, I got her a silver ankle bracelet, she likes her ankle jewellery, and she seemed pleased with it. I hope she was, because her present and the night out was all the money I could scrape together. I hate being - not poor, there are millions in England much worse off than I am right now, but, not as well off as I'd like to be.

The ongoing civil war in Syria took a major turn towards the end of this week. The rebel fighters, who've been fighting the government for over four years, made surprise gains on Friday, and by the end of the day, seemed to have control over the entire capital of Damascus. The president had apparently left the city, and even as I write this on Saturday morning, the TV is showing pictures of the rebels looting the presidential palace.

It's quite hard to believe that suddenly, a fight that's been in deadlock for what, a year, just resolves itself overnight. Losing the capital is obviously a deathblow for the government. They can't recover from that, like in Libya back in 2011, as soon as Tripoli fell, the war was effectively over. As usual, John Simpson for the BBC

was the first reporter on the ground. That guy is amazing, he seems to just have no fear, and is always right at the front of any conflict. He more than anyone is my influence to be a great reporter.

There is apparently some fighting still going on in Damascus, but there are only pockets of resistance, and with more and more of the rebel forces entering the city to secure it, it seems highly unlikely that what forces are left to the government will have a chance to re-take it.

Sunday, June 15th to Saturday, June 21st 2014

On Monday, after a weekend glued to the TV, I got into work to be told I had another evaluation. The boss pretty much tore me a new one. I think this is his revenge for my not staying to work late last Wednesday. He's insisted I go on a training course next week, to learn how to write better articles. I resisted the urge to deck the smug arsehole, he was smirking as he said it, I know this is his way of getting back at me. He can't just fire me over it, as I was well within my rights as per my employment contract, but he's also within *his* rights to insist I go on a training course. In Edinburgh. All week away from home. Not impressed.

Taima took it in her stride, she has a full weeks worth of work again next week, as she's covering student exams. Not the most exciting job, sitting in an exam room with 150 kids making sure none of them talk, or have smartphones, pads, or any one of a hundred other devices.

This year is the first year that schools have started to regularly employ EM interference in exam rooms. They'd had to after last year, when they discovered a student in Liverpool had had minor surgery to have a small receiver implanted into their earlobe, and had a micro-camera in their glasses. They'd transmitted the paper outside, to someone they'd paid to answer questions for them, and tell them the answers. You'd have to think if they put that ingenuity into actually studying, they'd be able to pass without cheating! The kid was only caught because he did so well when he was expected to barely pass, and confessed. And so, a new law was rushed through to

allow jamming of signals in future exams.

Thursday

Syria. I'm watching TV as I write. You no doubt already know what happened today, as it will go down as one of the blackest days in the history of the world. But I'll recount it as it happens, as I see it. I can only see it on TV, I'm not there, thankfully, but I can see the pictures, I can see what's happened. Cameras are still running in Damascus.

About two hours ago, the Syrian government struck Damascus. They launched a massive chemical attack on the city, using gas, nerve agents, poison, who knows what, that is unclear. What is clear is that they've completely destroyed the city.

At around 8pm UK time, 10pm Syrian time, when it was dark, the Syrian government's air force struck with maybe 40 planes, most of what's left of their air force. Each one of them had a massive payload of chemical weapons. They dropped bombs all over the city. Starting in the east, and moving west. Within 20 minutes they'd blanketed the city. I was watching the news when it started, John Simpson was reporting from there, he was watching the rebel government hold a meeting in the parliament building, swearing in a new president of Syria. Very symbolic. And that's when the attack started.

From within the building they heard the bombs start to fall. He and his cameraman ran outside to see what was happening. They had a good shot of the aircraft bombing the city, a few responses from rebel anti-air, but air attacks have always been the biggest weakness of the rebel forces. They've never managed to obtain serious anti-air capabilities, or an air force of their own.

Of course, the BBC reporters had no idea how serious it was. It looked like aircraft were dropping bombs, but in Syria an air-strike is something that you don't even get off the loo to hide from, it's such an everyday event.

John Simpson was just talking into the camera, talking about the strikes, when they started bombing his area, and he just - died. He got a funny look on his face, and fell out of camera shot. The camera fell to the floor, and by chance landed with him back in frame and we saw it all happen, in full colour, less than a metre away from the camera.

Everyone watching the news saw what happened. I won't describe it, I feel sick thinking about it. The camera kept on rolling, no doubt the cameraman was dying behind it. Beyond John Simpson, you could see others running, and then falling. I don't know how long it lasted, the BBC pulled the feed once they got over the shock. I've never seen a BBC news anchor cry on air before, but they did, both of them. And I joined them. I've never seen anything like it, it was, he just died in front of a million people on TV.

Friday

I stopped writing last night, I couldn't just keep talking into the pad while that was going on. I'm sure that all of what I was seeing on TV is archived and you can view it elsewhere, I'm not going to attach it to this diary entry.

It's now morning on Friday. I'm in the office, but nobody is working. We're all watching TV. Even the boss forgot to scowl at me this morning. If we were a bigger paper, we'd be covering this, but we're distributing today with a lead story about a car that ran over a guide dog. I can imagine that this edition will be even more budget liner than usual.

We're watching the reports from the BBC. They have other reporters in the country, but they all seem, stunned. I can't blame them. Later last night the planes came back, and dropped more bombs. Once they knew what was happening, the US unilaterally took action and sent planes into Syrian airspace. They have hazmat teams on the ground and they're reporting that pretty much everyone is dead or dying within the city.

Estimates are for about 800,000 dead. Luckily, if one can find anything about this lucky, over the last two years of fighting, many civilians had left the city. Back in 2009 before the fighting started, the population was closer to two million. Yesterday morning it was closer to one million. This morning, around 200,000 have fled to the surrounding countryside, and of those who knows how hurt they are.

We still don't know what they used, chemical weapons obviously, nobody thinks they had biological weapons. A BBC expert said that the pictures that had kept on coming in after they cut the feed to us,

seemed to indicate something like sarin was used.

Friday midday

New reports that the US planes from the carrier *John C Stennis* have destroyed the planes that had dropped the bombs, at an airfield just outside the second city of Aleppo. There's a UN emergency session going on, but good luck in the UN doing anything, they're so deadlocked it's amazing they can decide what time to break for lunch.

Friday, about 1pm

The Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad, has been on TV, and declared the end to the civil war, and that Aleppo is the temporary capital of Syria pending 'reconstruction'. The callous bastard didn't seem to even care he'd just had almost a million people killed. He was busy saying how glad he was that the fighting was over. And yeah, I bet it will be, with all of the rebel forces streaming into the capital to hold it last week, they're not even on the radar any more. He's won, no doubt. I wouldn't give a rat's left testicle for his chances of surviving alive till the end of the year, but he won his war. I just feel sick that this has happened, I hope the Russians are happy, after blocking action against Syria for the last three years, if they'd let the world protect the civilians like we all wanted, this wouldn't have happened. This is as much the fault of Putin as it is anyone else. I hope he feels proud of himself.

Friday evening

Sitting on the sofa with Taima, watching the TV. We ate, I can't remember what, but we're just watching. Survivor stories now, people who were on the outskirts of the city, or who were in the western side, who had time to run, but not many ran. Why would they, just another bombing run, they just thought it was the same as all the others, and so they didn't bother to run.

They've shown some footage from the US hazmat teams on the ground. The BBC wouldn't show that kind of thing, we saw that on CNN, and it was horrific. People had just died where they were, dogs,

cats, people, nothing was alive. No birds in the air. From what they said, it isn't usual for sarin to kill so many, but there was just so much chemical dropped, the whole city is covered in oily residue, still deadly to touch or breathe in. Those hazmat guys aren't paid enough, really. All over the place, cars went into walls, into each other, glass is broken, and they're walking through it, when a single cut in their suits could kill them, and they're still looking for survivors, they know there won't be any but they're still looking. They deserve a medal. They deserve all the medals, they really do.

Saturday

The government has announced HMS *Illustrious* is heading to the area. As it carries helicopters, it's ideal for aid distribution to the survivors, there seems to be little need for military intervention now, the opposition forces are pretty much gone. As news has developed, it seems that the Syrian government deliberately withdrew from Damascus, to draw in the enemy, and then destroy them, not caring how many civilians died.

I hope we send in the SAS and bury every last one of them that was responsible for this.

Turkey has said they're going to send in ground troops into Syria, and the Syrians have threatened to use chemical weapons on any forces crossing the border. I don't know what Turkey will do now, if they back down they look weak against someone that just killed a million civilians, if they don't their soldiers could be gassed to death. Great, this is just going to spread.

Sunday, June 22nd to Saturday, June 28th 2014

Sunday

The last thing I wanted this week is to be away from home. Taima seems pretty freaked by what happened - hell, *I'm* pretty freaked, and

I want to stay home, but the boss is insisting I still go on this stupid training course in Edinburgh, and so here I am, on the train on Sunday evening, northbound and in a foul mood. His stupid petty small minded little brain won't budge a centimetre. He has this little area of power and he wants to show us all how big he is. I so want to quit my job, but I can't, I need to find something else first, and yeah, good luck to me with that one. Unemployment is up this month, I can't see that being a great indicator that I'll find a new job quickly. I think I'll spend my evenings this week applying for new jobs, though. I'll have crap all else better to do in Edinburgh.

Monday

It just feels like the whole world is holding its breath right now. Are we all going to invade Syria, like we did in Afghanistan in 2001? I'm not a warmonger, but I hope so. This can't be allowed to stand.

The course today was a washout, full of teenagers all learning basic writing skills. This is more like a creative writing course than a course to improve journalistic skills. The guy teaching is an old guy who hasn't once mentioned the word journalism. Besides which, who on Earth is paying attention to a course. I spent half the day with my pad tuned into the BBC. I had to have it muted and on subtitles though, it would have been annoying to the rest of the class to have my earpiece in, cos no matter how quiet it is, it isn't as quiet as a classroom. The news was all predictably about Damascus, I don't think anything else even got a look in. Reports from the teams searching the city were the same today as since the attack. Still not a single survivor has been found. Not a one.

I wonder if the class teacher has even heard what's happened. He droned on without really paying attention to his students, and seemed to be in a world of his own. What a waste of time.

Rest of week

The rest of the week pretty much followed the course of Monday. Dull classes, watching the news as I ignored the teacher. Of course he didn't care, he'd been paid. Who knows how much the boss paid to

send me on this farce, but whatever it was, he was ripped off. Not that that makes me sad.

Things in Syria haven't moved. The US has a carrier off of the Syrian coast, HMS *Illustrious* is there too, as is the French *Charles de Gaulle* carrier. Even the Japanese have a carrier, the *Ise*, on the way, their first deployment outside of Japanese waters in 60 years. The Chinese are being conspicuous by their absence, but I expect to see their only carrier, the *Liaoning*, show up any day too. The coast of Syria is going to start looking like an aircraft carrier car park before too much longer.

The UN is doing what it does best. It's talking. The Syrian ambassador to the UN was almost lynched, but for some reason, gee I wonder why, he had a whole bunch of bodyguards with him when he entered the UN chamber.

Turkey hasn't invaded. That's probably a good thing. They've sent some planes over Syrian airspace, I don't really know why, I'm not a military strategist, maybe they're daring the Syrians to shoot them down to give them an excuse to invade, but really, they already have a million reasons to, as do the rest of the world.

In other news this week, on Thursday, the energy companies flat out refused to take the pain of the winter fuel allowance onto their own shoulders. They've said they'll charge OAP's the same amount they charge everyone else. They have no responsibility to give favouritism from one group to another, and in fact to do so would be against EU law that says fuel should be available at a uniform price regardless of the status, age, or means of the customer.

I did a quick check and they're right. If they did what the government tells them to, they would break EU law. If they don't they'll break UK law. This is one going straight to the European courts, I can see it now. In the meantime, the pensioners in the UK are looking at a cold winter. I don't envy them.

I got home late on Friday evening, past midnight, but finally, I was home. I was so tired I almost fell asleep as Taima was showing me how glad she was that I was home. Almost fell asleep - not quite :-)

Sunday, June 29th to Saturday, July 5th 2014

Over a week later, and finally the UN acted, but they may as well not have bothered. The Russians negotiated the teeth out of the resolution, so their good friends in Damascus, sorry Aleppo, get to keep their jobs, and don't get 100,000 foreign troops on their soil.

The end result of a weeks worth of debate? A no fly zone.

How much use is a no-fly zone when the US already destroyed what was left of their air force. It's utterly ridiculous. I can't remember when the UN has seemed so pointless, except the last time they failed to act, and the time before that. Oh and the time before that too. I know they do some good work, but they just have no credibility left when it comes to resolving conflicts. They should have had this fixed three years ago, but Russia wouldn't let them.

Even being from a country that has a veto, I reckon getting rid of the five vetoes that the security council has is essential for them actually ever getting anything done. Look at the Israeli problem, the US will veto anything that happens there. Russia vetoes anything about Syria or Iran, it makes it complete deadlock. On the other hand, maybe it's a good thing in some ways. A country that can just nuke their enemies, maybe a veto is better than a conflict over something that they seriously disagree with, and the chance of nuclear war. So, maybe the situation isn't as black and white as I think it is, who knows. All I know is, I'm pretty disgusted with the UN right now.

I reported back to the boss on Monday, he shrugged his shoulders when I said the course was pointless, and just told me to get back to work, he didn't care. I spent the rest of the day talking to people in town, and got a few local interest stories started. The guy who called me about the trees being cut down was the most amusing. I'm not writing an article about it, but I'll mention it here. He called me again, I have a horrible feeling he thinks I'm his private publishing channel now, and I'll print whatever he says. He wanted to complain about the trees again. Because they've all gone, the wind has increased around his house, and he wanted to complain that the wind had blown off his

toupee while he was gardening over the weekend. I admit it, I laughed. I just couldn't help myself. I know it was wrong of me, but I just cracked. I apologised, but he was a bit surly over it, but you know what, I needed that. I haven't had a laugh in weeks, it feels like. I felt about 10 years younger afterwards.

For the rest of the week, I covered my stories, and watched as absolutely nothing happened in Syria. A group of protesters have set up camp outside the Syrian embassy. Won't do much good, we've expelled the Syrian ambassador and his staff, but it's symbolic, I guess.

Greece and Germany started up again this week. They'd had a couple of weeks off from bickering with each other after Damascus, but I think they've decided enough is enough, time to get back to the serious business of wagging fingers at each other.

The Americans had their independence day on Friday. It was a bit of a muted affair, from the TV pictures I saw. A lot of places cancelled their fireworks and parties because of Damascus. I'm always in two minds about that kind of thing. Yes, it was terrible, and we should be serious about it, but a celebration and some fireworks will make people feel better. It'll make people happier, and I don't see that as a bad thing. Call me callous, but I'd like to see more happy people, even if bad shit is happening too.

Sunday, July 6th to Saturday, July 12th 2014

I've booked this week off of work. I just needed a break. A week of not having to deal with the boss, not having to wade through the underworld of Didcot... OK that's an exaggeration, a week of not having to desperately wander the streets looking for something that isn't too boring to report on. It's my first ever paid week off from a job. I get to sit around and do nothing all week, and be paid for it. How awesome is that. And I get to do it three more times before next April too!

I was quite pleased when I got a delivery on Monday, the new battery for my pad had arrived. A month's battery life on a single charge, so the marketing bump says, and so far, it seems to be living up to the claims. After putting it into the pad on Tuesday and charging it up overnight, I've not had to recharge, and it's still saying it's 87% full (this is Saturday now). I haven't used the pad much, just a bit of web browsing, making a few notes on next weeks stories, but still, my old battery would be dead by now without a recharge. I've had to be careful to remember to not put it down on the charging surfaces. So easy to forget. I think I did give it an extra couple of percent charge when I went off to make a cup of tea earlier in the week, but still, it's still pretty awesome.

I didn't want to, but I did spend a lot of the week watching the news. The information junkie that I am, I couldn't just switch it off. Had a couple of small days out with Taima, we went to see a film midweek, and yesterday we went to London and wandered round the British Museum for a while. I think she enjoys it there more than I do, I mean, it's cool and all, but, it's all dead and in the past. I'm more a future, technology, current events kinda guy. But she wanted to go and so I put on my best enthusiastic face and went along.

Sunday, July 13th to Saturday, July 19th 2014

Getting back into the swing of work. Mondays after a week off are *hard*. I don't like them, and I think they should be banned. Mondays after a weeks holiday should be days you get to just sit in the office and re-acclimatise yourself with the idea of slaving away for the benefit of others. No actual work needed, just time to relax and re-orient yourself. But no, back to the grindstone as soon as 9am hit.

There was actually some real local news this week. There was an announcement that the power station, Didcot-A, which has been switched off for the past year or so, is being demolished to make way for a new power plant. That means cooling towers being blown up, lots of excitement, explosions, and a few news cycles I can burn up

writing about it. It's planned for September 20th. Good of them to arrange it for a weekend, where people can watch it. No news on what the new plant will be. Dare I hope it will be solar, that we've decided to invest in some renewables. Of course not, it'll be some new polluting monstrosity.

Syria has been in the news again, they've demanded compensation from the US for the loss of the planes that were destroyed on the night of the attack on Damascus. The US president came on TV and used some very un-president-like language to tell the Syrians how likely that was to happen. I've never heard a head of state tell another head of state to, and I quote, "go fuck yourself," on live TV before. I think that president Assad is pushing his luck here. The world hasn't punished him for the murder of a million people, and so he thinks he can get away with anything. If you ask me, the NATO countries, and the US in particular, are just spoiling for a fight and it wouldn't surprise me if they just ignored the UN and went in and wiped Assad's smug face all over the wall, along with any military forces that support him.

The Greece and Germany thing has come to a conclusion. It's good because they'll stop being aggressive to each other, but it's bad, in that as long as it didn't go too far, it was really really funny seeing their politicians making snide comments and badly disguised sarcastic remarks. Obviously I wouldn't like to see anything serious between them, but the dialogue has been a bright point of each week. However they've agreed that Greece will carry on repaying its debts to the EU, and the EU will offer guarantees on the Drachma. It means, in effect, that the Drachma had a massive rebound this week, not up to where it was when they re-launched it last month, but at a respectable level that experts are saying is a fair representation of its value. Almost overnight the riots in Athens and other Greek cities petered out, and it looks like this could be a real solution for them. They still have massive problems, but at least this one has stabilised for now.

Sunday, July 20th to Saturday, July 26th 2014

Monday was a bad day. We got reports in the early afternoon of yet another US school shooting. It was at a high school (so ages 14-18), and it ended up with 24 dead, all of them teachers. It seems a whole gang of kids all had had enough with their teachers, and eight of them got hold of guns and went into school to kill as many teachers as they could. It does defy belief, I mean, why do they still have such a stupid gun culture over there? Look at the figures people, more guns mean more shootings. If you have no guns, then shooting levels will go right down. It's really hard to kill people by pointing at them and yelling "BANG". But no, they still sell millions of guns a year for their right to be protected and safe, and it makes them so unsafe they don't even understand.

At least this time it wasn't dozens of kids dead like it usually is. And the shooters all surrendered, which was also unusual. Usually they end up dead having killed themselves, or made the police do it. Not that teachers being dead is a good thing, of course, but it always seems more tragic when it's a bunch of kids who never got a chance at life. Of course the deaths of 24 people who'd made it their life's work to educate and enlighten the young is as much of a tragedy, but it doesn't feel as bad. Maybe that makes me a bad person, but it's how I feel.

And so what did we cover in our newspaper? Well, we had to have a link, so we covered - truancy.

Yup, we had a full page spread about how local schools were seeing too many kids skipping classes, and the paper had me go and hunt around town for them and interview some of them. I won't dignify the article by including it here, it was utter trash. Linking something like that shooting with how kids in the UK aren't attending classes. Shameless, it really is. I hate my boss more and more each time he does something like this.

We expected all week that the US president would make an announcement about gun control over there, that maybe he'd grow a backbone and actually do something positive with his presidency, but, as per usual, a vast roar of silence from the White House. By the end of the week, the story was pretty much forgotten, and the US gun freaks got to keep their guns for a few more months till the next

massacre of innocents, when yet again, I expect nothing will be done.

Sunday, July 27th to Saturday, August 2nd 2014

A quiet week, which was welcome. I finally had to recharge my pad when it ran out of juice on Tuesday. Not too bad, that's almost a month of power on a single charge with my new battery. Taima had four days work at the local school doing sickness cover, which made for a much nicer atmosphere at home.

I started getting ill on Wednesday, and by the next morning, it was full-blown flu. I've taken the rest of the week off. There's no way that evil-boss will believe I'm ill, as I've booked next week off on holiday for my birthday. I don't care, he can fire me if he likes and I'll take him for unfair dismissal and get a chunk of money for while I look for a new job. I just don't care, I feel like death, leave me alone.

Sunday, August 3rd to Saturday, August 9th 2014

A second holiday week in a month, how awesome is this, especially as I started to feel better almost as soon as Saturday came round. It really is a coincidence, but sometimes coincidences are awesome. We've not got the money to do anything expensive, but we booked a three day midweek break in Cornwall. I spent my birthday in the middle of nowhere on the coast. It was nice and warm, with a sea breeze to stop it getting too hot (I don't like too much heat at all), and we enjoyed just acting like a pair of teenagers, splashing each other in the sea, I got buried in sand up to my neck for Taima's amusement, lots of fun. There was nobody else on the beach at all, so while she was getting changed I stole her clothes and she had to chase me naked down the beach for a good five minutes. It was a really good break, and we did a lot of laughing. Sometimes we both tend to be a bit serious, and it really made for a nice change. We tried to book an extra day at the B&B but they were booked, and expecting new guests that evening so we reluctantly headed back to Didcot on Friday

evening.

The only downside is that Taima ‘accidentally’ forgot to pack my pad. I know I packed it, and I know she unpacked it whilst reorganising the bags. I don’t think it was that bad a thing really, it stopped me just spending all break working or web browsing, or other things I can do at any time. I’m glad she did it.

Sunday, August 10th to Saturday, August 16th 2014

Ahh I hate Mondays after holidays. Wait, I’m sure I said that this time last month. Yep, I did. So, back to work, and covering all of the big stories that matter to Didcot. The traffic lights they removed just after I moved here, well, they’re being put back. A guide dog was killed on the crossing a few weeks ago, and there’s been a bit of an uproar about it. In as much as a small town can uproar. More a quiet murmur of irritation.

There were some disturbances in London later in the week. The group of people protesting at the Syrian embassy managed to get past the police who really weren’t trying too hard to protect it, and burned the place down. Absolutely gutted the building. Unfortunately it also gutted the Portuguese embassy next door. The Portuguese probably didn’t want their neighbours, but they DID want their embassy, and the news was full of the Portuguese ambassador complaining and the prime minister apologising for the fire. I can see their point, but I can see the point of the protesters burning it down. A million dead and not even a slap on the wrist, thanks to the UN being unable to organise a pissup in a brewery.

A million dead. You can’t even imagine that kind of number. One dead, you can see it. 24 dead like at that US school, it’s a big thing. But a million, it’s like, how do you react to that? How do you even comprehend it? It’s like, everyone you’ve ever met, and everyone you’ve ever even seen, even on TV, that’s probably about a million people. Every single person that has ever come across your vision, in your life. They’re all dead. How can it be so big? I don’t know. It’s too much to understand for anyone.

Sunday, August 17th to Saturday, August 23rd 2014

The austerity measures have continued this week. A new bill has been announced which will link retirement age to average life expectancy. To be honest it seems like a good idea to me. We had loads of protests a couple of years ago when they changed the retirement age from 65 to 68, so changing it to a linked number makes a whole lot of sense. The proposal is for male retirement age to be 10% short of life expectancy, female to be 15% short of life expectancy. Which by my reckoning is 72 for men and 70 for women. That's a jump that will get right up some peoples nose. I expect more protests.

But what else can we do. We can't keep planning to retire at age 68, with the funds for a 5-10 year retirement, and live for an average of 10-15 years afterwards, it just isn't sustainable. At least this way, as life expectancy increases, so does the amount of time we work, the amount of money we put into pension funds, and so it covers the correct amount of average retirement life.

OK so maybe I'd see things a bit differently if I was older, and I was closer to retirement and I was about to have to work for four more years, but I'm not, and I don't. The advantage of the younger generation, we can see these things more more clearly.

Tuesday

Yep, protests it is, and a riot in Sheffield. Thankfully around here it's quiet, which is a bit of a surprise, as the demographic of the area is certainly tending towards the older generations. I've written an article for this weeks paper which covers the facts and tries to explain why it makes sense, and how we can't just take all the benefits of longer life and greater health, without paying for them by working a little longer. Somehow I have a feeling that this won't go down well with the boss. He's in the age range where he's really pissed about the change. I reckon he's in his late 50's, and so he'll be feeling those extra four years.

Late Tuesday

Wow, I'm surprised, he didn't refuse to publish it. He said it gave him something to think about. I'm beyond stunned, I was expecting another rant about doing my job properly, and instead he actually read the article with an open mind and agreed it was good to go in the next edition. I still don't like the guy, but I hate him a bit less today than I did yesterday.

Rest of week

Well, the protests died down quickly enough. It seems nobody was that serious about it, even Sheffield has cleaned up after the night of rioting. It makes me laugh. 'We're really angry, we'll stay here and protest all year if we have to, we're going to fight until – ohhh look, something good on TV, best get home so I don't miss it.'

Sunday, August 24th to Saturday, August 30th 2014

Well, the big news this week is that right on the heels of the government announcing a change in the retirement age, Scotland has announced its date for its independence referendum. Clever move by the Scottish government that is. London makes an unpopular announcement, and Scotland says 'right, we're off'. It'll make the vote a lot closer than recent polls have suggested, that's for sure.

October 12th is the date for the vote. I expect we won't get too overloaded with advertising on TV down here, after all, we can't vote, but I feel a bit sorry for everyone north of the border They're going to get wall to wall propaganda by both sides. It'll be like a US election, and I expect the victory won't go to the side that puts their case across better, it'll go to the side that pisses off the electorate least.

Here is the article I wrote on it, I think it covers both sides, but makes it clear which way I think it should go.

Scotland to Vote

It has been 307 years since the Act of Union brought Scotland and England together on May 1st 1707. In just over a month's time, on

October 12th 2014, we will see if the union is strong enough to survive what many believe to be its biggest test to date.

At 7am on that day, Scottish polls will open, asking the public one question. 'Should Scotland remain a part of the UK'.

The ramifications of the vote could not be more serious. If Scotland leaves, then the UK will lose around 8.5% of its population, and with it a corresponding percentage of our GDP, that will push us out of the top ten largest economies in the world, losing many exclusive privileges we have because of our membership of that club.

If Scotland decides to stay, then the matter is likely to remain closed for the lifetime of everyone in the country. One of the conditions of allowing the vote, is that a no vote will mean no further vote can be called on the subject for a hundred years.

These things alone mean the vote is probably the most serious one that the Scottish people ever have, or ever will, take part in.

In practical terms, a breakup will lead to a short term gain for England. Scotland receives more money from the government per head of population than does England, and so the change in financial allocation will mean more money can be spent per person in England. The agreed distribution of North Sea Oil will mean that both countries would continue to benefit from this revenue, and with much of the processing being done in Scotland, this will be a good source of employment for them.

However, on the downside, Scotland will either be outside of the EU, or will have to negotiate entry. The EU has ruled that Scotland will not become a member as soon as it splits. And of course, all new EU members must adopt the Euro, and there is fierce opposition to the Euro north of the border.

With England's relegation out of the top ten economies in the world, we will have less say in the big global decisions. We will of course remain an important country, but our influence will be much reduced.

For Scotland the effect will be even more pronounced. Their economy will end up at roughly the size of the economy of Norway, and their global influence will effectively vanish overnight.

Should Scotland stay or go? That is, ultimately, a matter for the Scots to decide. Looking back over the last 300 years, both countries have benefited greatly from the union. No country in the last 200 years has had as many inventors and innovators as Scotland, and their association with England has allowed what is a small country, to have global presence way above that which it could have achieved alone.

Culturally we have enriched each other, and we have stood as allies against fascism, communism, and a thousand other threats that have endangered this island. Will we still do so by the end of the year?

Only they can decide that.

Sunday, August 31st to Saturday, September 6th 2014

New unemployment figures this week. It's up again, from 16.2% to 16.5%. They say that 20% is a bit of a tipping point when we start getting real problems that are hard to recover from without drastic measures. Looking at Greece, you can see it in action. The riots may have died down, but you can see the tension, and see the desperation on the faces of the people on TV. They hit 35% a few months ago. It's hard to see how they can pull it back from the brink. I mean, OK, getting a handle on corruption would be a start, but I don't even know if that would be enough.

Taima has been doing a little more sick cover work for a local school again this week, but I have a bad feeling it may not be happening again. Apparently she had a 'disagreement' with the head teacher. Apparently he said something that was a bit racist, and she couldn't keep her mouth shut, and so, yeah, not good.

Don't get me wrong, she shouldn't have to keep her mouth shut, the head was a million percent in the wrong, but, sometimes you just

have to suck it up. The guy is old, from that generation where casual racism was the norm. She's always spoken well of him, and so I expect he didn't mean anything by it. Not that that excuses it, but when your job is at stake, and the head isn't a bad guy, maybe calling him a racist pig isn't the best tactic.

Of course, then I didn't help by saying this to her, and she was in tears and I felt like a shit for not being more understanding. Relationships suck sometimes, I never know when I need to be understanding, or honest, or supportive, or just to shut my own mouth. She wasn't angry at me, she knew I was right, I think I should have been more supportive and less 'well that was stupid'. I can be thoughtless sometimes.

I took her out to dinner the next night, Friday. After, we had one of those long talks that went well into Saturday, I think we got to bed at about 6am. I think we cleared a lot of air, and neither of us shouted, which is good.

Sunday, September 7th to Saturday, September 13th 2014

Tuesday

It's all kicking off again. Turkey sent troops across the border into Syria on Monday. The Syrians made good on their promise, and used chemical weapons against them. Why on Earth the Turks sent their men across the border without protection, when they'd been warned, I'll never know.

The Syrians have no air force left, but they have plenty of artillery and missiles. The missiles, Scuds like everyone in that part of the world seems to own, were pretty much useless. The Turkish army had borrowed Patriot missile systems a few years ago, and they took out every single missile before they got close. The artillery, on the other hand, decimated the Turkish division that had been sent over the border.

TV crews in Turkey have shots of them routed and breaking for the border, many of them with dead or dying in their vehicles. This is a real embarrassment for Turkey, but maybe it will be the final straw,

and we'll finally do something about Assad.

Wednesday

The Turkish government has fired the head of the army. They're claiming that the incursion was not authorised by the government, and was the fault of the area commander. If you ask me, they've been made to look like idiots, and are blaming someone else for their mistakes. The government and army in Turkey have never got on well, probably because the army keeps overthrowing the government whenever they interfere in army politics.

Friday

What am I, some sort of prophet or what?

This morning, the fired commander of the Turkish armed forces staged a coup, and deposed the government. The whole Islamist government is under arrest. They lasted for precisely the half an hour it took for the army to seize control. It seems that the only casualties were the presidential bodyguards who didn't feel like surrendering.

They've locked down the entire capital, but it seems to be quiet. Nothing like the uprisings that took down half of the Arab governments over the last few years, most of which ended in massive bloodshed. This was over in under an hour, and stability was never lost. They have experience in coups, do the Turkish army.

Sunday, September 14th to Saturday, September 20th 2014

Well, I'm forced to take back some things I said a few weeks ago. If you were paying attention to my entries, you would see I wrote about a school shooting over in the states. 24 staff killed. I went on a bit about how they should take all the guns away, and stuff like that. I still believe that, but, over the last few days, more information has emerged, the whole thing wasn't anywhere near as black and white as it seemed.

I mean, a school shooting, how more black and white can you get.

Shooters bad, victims good. It isn't really up for debate.

Except this time. You see, it turns out that the kids were acting as a group in self defence, and in defence of their classmates. The staff that were killed, it's now being said that they were members of a paedophile group that had effectively taken over the school. One of them got a job as school principal, and then hired more of them as teachers, until almost every teacher was involved.

The kids had told their parents, the police, but nobody believed them. They were accused of making up stories, of trying to get their teachers fired, because in Bible Belt America, no teachers would be like that, obviously the kids are lying.

And so, what else do they do? Nobody to turn to, they defended themselves. I don't know if it was right, maybe they could have tried other things, but they were being abused, systematically, literally by the class-load, and I don't know what the right response is to something that horrible.

The mainstream media were all trying to backtrack on their earlier stories, some of them like the BBC were just saying 'yep, we made a mistake, but it was an understandable one', while some of the tabloids were pretending they were right all along. The Daily Mail was still sticking to the original story, in a kind of 'we'll either be right and get all the glory, or we'll look so stupid we'll all be out of a job' kind of way.

As the week went on, even the Daily Mail changed its tune and admitted that they were wrong. And who said you can't teach old dogs - old stupid xenophobic sensationalist lying rumourmongering dogs - new tricks.

The week ended better though. On Saturday, it was big bang day at the power station. Didcot-A was blown up at midday, three cooling towers all went down at once. It was really cool, they did it so they went like dominoes, the first crashed into the second which fell into the third. Awesome. Hundreds of people were there to watch, not just from Didcot, I reckon about half of them were from Oxford and other local towns and villages. I don't know why I enjoyed it so much, but I did. Taima stayed home, said she'd seen enough explosions on TV recently and didn't feel the need to see any more. Maybe it's a guy

thing, but I loved it!

Sunday, September 21st to Saturday, September 27th 2014

I got a call this week from the Oxford Daily. They'd done some more digging and had found that the general CC'd on the Reaction Engines Freedom of Information letter was in fact in charge of the US Air Force's scramjet project. That's very interesting, as they're in direct competition with the Sabre engine project. I gave Alan Bond a call and we had a chat about it. When I told him what had been discovered, he was quite excited. His theory is that the government is actually doing something on their behalf and trying to pitch the Sabre engine to the US, after their continued failure to build a reliable scramjet engine. That sounds pretty plausible to me, even if highly surprising to find the government actually being proactive for a British company. I guess the conspiracy theory can be put away now. Shame, it would have made a good story, if I could have worked out what the conspiracy was.

I sent an email off to the US Department of Defence, asking for confirmation they were considering investing in the Sabre engine technology. I could hear the red tape from the other side of the Atlantic when the email arrived. I expect it'll be weeks, maybe years, till they reply, if they ever do. They have no obligation to reply to a reporter in the UK, unlike our own government.

Taima discovered that the school she'd been working at on and off to cover sickness and whatnot, has started to hire someone else. It looks like her row with the head there killed her chances of getting more work from them. I bit my tongue, and didn't say anything. I just offered hugs and support, and hopefully she'll find some other work soon.

The week ended on a pretty horrible note. There was early morning fog in the area, and there was a big smash on the M4 by junction 13. About 30 cars were involved and five people died. Work

called me up at 7am, and got me and a photographer, Floyd Benton, to go take a look, get some witness reports, and take some pictures. Floyd is a veteran, been on the job for 30 years, so he just took it in his stride. He's worked for some of the big papers, and he's just winding down his career in Didcot, because 'It's nice and easy work, and I don't have to traipse through third world hellholes to get my shots'.

I got some witness reports, he got some photos. I threw up. I then blacked out when I realised there was an arm on the road, with no owner. Floyd didn't laugh at me, said he'd seen bigger and tougher men than me faint when they saw this kind of thing for the first time. I'd never even seen a dead body before this, and those poor people were dead in nasty nasty ways.

Then again, is there any other way to die? It's never a nice thing to do.

Tragedy on local roads

Thick fog on Friday morning was responsible for the worst traffic accident in the last 20 years on the M4. 34 cars were involved in the pile-up, with five occupants of a minibus fatally injured after a lorry crashed into the side of their vehicle. A further eighteen others were injured, some seriously, and were taken to the John Radcliffe hospital.

The cause of the accident seems to be a car suffering a tyre failure at high speed, and hitting the central reservation. In the thick fog other drivers were unable to see or avoid the accident.

Jane Gadsden was on the slip road just about to join the motorway, and witnessed the accident out of her right window.

"I didn't really see that much, the fog was pretty thick. I heard cars slam on their brakes, and I could see a couple of cars were going literally sideways as they skidded, they came out of the fog sideways, and went back into the fog, followed by bangs. There was a big truck jackknifed and that made a huge bang, as I assume it ploughed into the cars that had crashed. If I'd been ten or fifteen seconds further

ahead, I'd probably have been down there among all that lot."

Many other drivers were too shaken up to give us an account of the events. Sergeant Griffiths from the British Transport Police confirmed that according to radar tracking information from roadside installations, many of the vehicles had been speeding. "It often happens, especially in the morning rush-hour. People want to get to work and avoid the jams, and so they put their foot down. Unfortunately, this time their cavalier attitude to safety has led to fatalities, including an entire family of five who were heading into London on a day trip."

With too many drivers breaking the speed limit on our roads, we can only hope that this accident will serve as a wakeup call to remind them that if they crash at high speeds, they definitely won't make it to their destination on time. If ever.

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I can't sleep after seeing all of that. I keep seeing the blood and the arm. I lay awake all of Friday night, I couldn't stop thinking about it. Just that arm lying there, I don't know whose it was. You aren't supposed to not know who owns an arm.

Sunday, September 28th to Saturday, October 4th 2014

I haven't been into work this week. Maybe I shouldn't be doing this job. If I can be so affected by what I see. I should be able to be dispassionate, that's the reporters watchword. Not that we don't care, but we have to be detached, report the facts and let the reader make the judgements.

I heard that Floyd really went to bat for me at work, he stood up to the boss when he got angry that I'd called in and said I wasn't ready to come in. Debby, my editor, told me what'd happened. She came round on Monday evening to make sure I was OK. I wasn't, but I told her I was. She didn't believe a single word I said. I didn't even know

we were friends, she's always so direct and critical and telling me what to change on my articles, but I guess that's her job. I got a hug from her, and she didn't tell me I was being stupid. She gave me the name of someone to go and talk to, if I wanted to. I took the details, but I'll be OK, I don't need to call anyone. I just need some time to get my head together.

Wednesday

I've barely slept in five days. If it weren't for the fact that I'm voicing this into the pad, I'd have so many typos you wouldn't be able to read it. I've had an hour here and there, but that's all. I called the number that Debby gave me. Taima has been great, she's tried to do all she can to help out, but, she doesn't know how to handle this any more than I do. I'm going to go see this guy, Dr. Smith, tomorrow.

Friday

Through the wonders of modern medicine, I got a good nights sleep last night. No dreams, just a pill, a glass of water, and gone, 14 hours worth. Dr. Smith, as it turns out, has had a good bit of experience in this kind of thing. She's a regular first call for the press who've seen things they didn't want to see. She flat out told me that she couldn't just flip a switch for me, and make me forget it all, but she said that the first thing I needed was a good nights sleep. And I did, I really did. I feel, well, I keep thinking about it, but I'm trying to not let it stop me doing things. I don't know how to tell Taima that if she walks up behind me and gives me a hug, the first thing I see when she does is her arm, and, I go there again, thinking about the arm in the road. She makes it worse when she tries to make it better. She's really trying but I want her to stop, just give me some space and let me sort it out in my head.

Sunday, October 5th to Saturday, October 11th 2014

Sunday

I'm stopping at a local B&B tonight. Just to get some time to myself. I think Taima is really upset that I'm staying here tonight, but she just won't leave me alone, she keeps trying to help. I've tried to ask her to stop, just act as if I'm not there, and she keeps on asking why and what she can do. She just isn't listening to me! I know she wants me to feel better but for fucks sake, just five minutes alone - is it too much to ask!

Rest of week

I stayed in the B&B until Thursday morning. I've worked from there all week, the boss called me and told me it was OK for me to work from home. I didn't explain that home wasn't home for the moment. I'd sent Taima emails every day trying to explain how I feel and that it isn't her fault, and I just needed some space to myself. She didn't reply. I got angry and broke a window at the B&B when I threw my pad out of it. I don't know how it didn't break, but it survived - the pad I mean, the window was ruined. I had to pay for the window to be replaced, and the B&B owner told me I'd have to leave if it happened again. Fair enough, I wouldn't want anyone in my home if they were the kind of person I am right now.

I went home on Thursday lunchtime, the flat was empty, and I didn't know if Taima had just decided enough was enough, and had left. I wouldn't blame her. But she'd left a note on the Freezer, she was in London for an interview, and would be back that evening.

I made dinner and she came home. I was relieved, she hadn't dated the letter, she could have left it on Monday for all I knew, and she hadn't been home for three days. She tried really hard to be distant and give me space, just saying hi when she got home, not mentioning that I'd been gone for half a week, trying to be normal, but not too touchy-feely. I appreciated it. She told me she hadn't replied to my emails as she wasn't really sure what to say and didn't want to upset me any more than she already had. I haven't told her about the window, or how angry I was. She was trying to do what I'd asked and I can't blame her for that. She asked if I wanted her to sleep on the sofa, and I got a genuine smile when I said no, of course not. First smile I've seen from her for a while.

I went back to see Dr. Smith at the end of the week. It was odd, we just chatted, I thought people like this were supposed to have a sofa and ask me how I felt about my mother, but no, a hard plastic chair and I was talking about anything I felt like. I guess the NHS had to sell all their sofas to cut down on their budget deficits, or something.

We didn't mention the crash all session, we talked about my stop at the B&B, why I was angry at Taima - I'm not but Dr. Smith seemed to think I am - and just, random stuff. Hell, I could do her job, she just sits there and lets people waffle on, and gets paid for doing it. I don't think I'll go back next week, to be honest.

Sunday, October 12th to Saturday, October 18th 2014

Scotland makes its choice

In the end, the vote on Scottish independence wasn't even close. When the final count came in in the early hours of Monday morning, the vote was already long decided. By 11pm, only two hours after the polls closed, the vote was inevitable, and Scotland is staying as a part of the UK.

The final result, of 69% to stay, and 29% to leave, was a long way from being the close contest that everyone had predicted. If anything, people had expected it to go the other way, with the last polls before the referendum showing a narrow lead for the leave campaign.

The Prime Minister congratulated the Scottish people for making their choice based on "a fair and realistic balancing of the choices, which will lead to a stronger union between our two countries, and a stronger United Kingdom".

The Scottish First Minister, Alex Salmond, who had staked his whole reputation on the outcome, resigned on Monday morning, saying his position was untenable, with the majority of the Scottish public disagreeing with what he held to be the most important choice the

country would ever make.

Not everyone has dealt with the situation as professionally, however. In Glasgow, the heart of the independence movement, people took to the streets as the results came in, and thousands of them gathered in George Square chanting 'Fix', and waving banners demanding a recount.

With such a wide gap, however, and international monitors declaring the vote to be clean, it is hard to see how a recount could possibly change the result.

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The general feeling after the vote is that this is a good thing. Some people are saying it's a vindication of government policy, but I don't think I'd go that far. I don't know if it's that the Scottish people are happy with the way the country is right now, but I have a feeling that it's more that they're just worried that an independent Scottish government would make an even bigger hash of it than Westminster has.

I'm back in the office this week. The boss wasn't horrible to me even once. I feel a whole lot better, and I've been sleeping well, albeit with chemical assistance still. I like not having dreams, and I do wake up feeling refreshed and ready to face the day. There was a package on my desk, all nicely gift wrapped, when I got in on Monday. It was a big bottle of vodka. No note, just a bottle. No idea which one of them put it there, or if all of them did, but it was a nice thought.

Not that I drink much, but it's the thought that counts.

I spent the week writing up a couple more filler stories for the paper. One was about the growing number of birds in the town, and the messes they leave all over the pavement wherever you look. The other was a feelgood story about a girl who rescued a kitten from a drain where it was obviously stuck. The kitten was cute, I went with Floyd to get some pictures. After we'd done the interview with the

girl, I took Floyd out for a drink and bought him lunch, as a thank you for sticking up for me with the boss. He just shrugged it off, but I wanted him to know I really had appreciated it.

I went back to see Dr. Smith on Friday. I know I said I wouldn't, and I don't think it's going to do me much good, but I was running low on the sleeping pills, and needed a new prescription. She gave me one, and then made me sit and talk to her for a whole two hour session. Two hours, I don't know how she didn't fall asleep. I talked about my job, I talked about what kind of films I like, I talked about the problems at my parents with my dad being unemployed - yeah she finally got me discussing my parents, I knew it would happen in the end. She still hasn't wanted to discuss the accident, and I'm not sure why. Maybe it's some psychologists tactic, don't talk about things to make you think about things, who knows. I know more about crochet than I do about psychology, and all I know about crochet is how to spell it.

Using a spell checker.

Sunday, October 19th to Saturday, October 25th 2014

I expect I was one of many millions of people who was watching Mars on Sunday with great excitement, as comet Siding Spring made a *really* close pass on the planet. The *Curiosity* rover pointed its camera upwards, and we got to watch as the comet's 42km wide core came into contact with the outer atmosphere and began to glow. It looked big, even from the view of the rover, and for about 20 seconds, it just lit up the sky, a bright trail of light and debris, before bouncing off of the atmosphere and continuing its journey out of the solar system.

That wasn't the end of it though, not by far. For hours throughout Sunday afternoon we got to watch an absolutely amazing meteor shower, hundreds of shooting stars through the Martian atmosphere every minute, it was like a massive fireworks display, I've never seen anything like it.

People in Japan and the surrounding countries, who were the ones lucky enough to be facing Mars at the time of the main flyby, were uploading some pretty cool images. The National Observatory of Japan had a really clear image of the streak of the comet passing across the face of Mars.

Pretty much all of that paled in comparison to the images from the *Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter*. NASA had burned off some of the satellite's fuel, and moved it into position to get an amazing shot of the flyby. Video it took showed the comet streaking by below the satellite in absolutely minute detail. It was probably one of the most amazing things I've ever seen.

Back on the work front, I've got tired waiting for a response to my letter from the US Department of Defence, so I've drafted an article for this week, based on the guess of Alan Bond that the government may be trying to get the US Air Force to invest in the Sabre engine. It's so full of guesswork and hearsay that I hesitate to call it journalism, but that doesn't really stop newspapers, now does it. I could probably sell this article to the Daily Mail for its lead story.

Local company on the US radar

Local business Reaction Engines received some welcome news recently, when it appeared that the government has been doing some behind the scenes negotiating on their behalf.

The Sabre engine, a low cost high performance engine that could revolutionise space travel, looks to have been pitched to the US Air Force as an alternative to their proposed scramjet engine, which has suffered from massive development overruns and technical difficulties.

The US Air Force has declined to comment on the rumours, although it is confirmed that US General Hall, commander of the scramjet project, is in direct contact with members of our government, and believed to be negotiating a deal to provide funding for the Sabre project.

Mr. Alan Bond, founder of Reaction Engines, the developers of the Sabre engine, has denied receiving any firm information from the treasury department about new funding from the Americans, but he seemed to be confident that the project's pace may soon be stepped up, with a ground test full size prototype completed within the coming months.

If the rumours turn out to be true, it could mean a big boost for the local economy, with new jobs and new technology being developed at their Culham headquarters. Although it is unusual for the government to directly intervene in the dealings of a privately held company, the short cut to new funding that this opportunity may provide could be a significant boost for the UK space industry.

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I handed it over to my editor, who took a quick read through it and screwed up the printout and threw it at me. She said she wouldn't let it through until I have more confirmed information, instead of 'rumour this and hearsay that'. I admit, she's right, I was hoping they'd let it slide, but then, why should they.

Later on, the boss called me into his office and told me he'd said he didn't want me doing new stories about Reaction Engines. I told him I thought it was OK now, since the Oxford Daily bought the rights to the last lot, but he said he didn't want me to waste any more time on the story, and that there were plenty more good local companies to do articles on, and maybe I could find some I could do an unbiased story about - 'if you know what one of those is,' he finished with.

If I know what an unbiased story is. Of course I bloody well do, but I also know that the locals want to see their newspapers championing the local businesses, sticking up for the community, not being dry and impartial, and to be quite frank, boring.

Wednesday

I know it's wrong to celebrate someone's death, but I feel like doing a Tom Cruise and jumping up and down insanely on the sofa. President Assad of Syria was found dead in his bedroom this morning. It seems some naughty naughty person has managed to get into his rooms, and kill him. First reports indicate that they killed him by poisoning him with sarin. How amazingly appropriate, the same chemical that was one of the main weapons he used against his own people, used to kill him. Everyone is denying knowing anything about it, and the Syrian government has promised to declare war against whoever did it.

Someone, somewhere, has a big smug grin on their face because they know who did it, and I'd like to buy that person a drink. It doesn't bring back the 800,000 people who died in Damascus, but it's justice for them. Nobody should be able to do something like that and get away with it, and now, they haven't.

I for one hope it was the SAS, or MI6, that did it, I'd like to think we have a good sense of justice in this country, and the capability to act on it. I expect a few other countries have the capability. The Americans obviously. The French we know can do things like this since they blew up that Greenpeace boat all those years ago. When it comes to it, probably most of the developed world is a candidate for this medal.

Thursday

The Syrian government did a strange thing today, something I've never seen before, and I can't find a reference of ever happening before. They've officially declared war against 'the nation or nations responsible for the assassination of president Assad'. So they are at war, but they don't know who against.

They delivered their announcement to the UN, broadcast around the world. I expect the reaction they were hoping for was one of concern, maybe some ambassador would give the game away by looking worried cos he knew his country was the guilty party. Instead the Syrian ambassador was actually laughed at. A whole bunch of ambassadors and representatives just laughed out loud at how ludicrous the announcement was. They are at war but they don't know who with, and they have neither the equipment, manpower, or money

to actually carry out the war they've declared. There was a film I remember seeing when I was a kid, about a situation like this. I now know why it was a comedy, I just didn't expect its script to play out in real diplomatic circles.

Things are a fair bit better at home. I've bought a new PS4 games console for the flat. I had to buy it on credit, but it's really nice to have a distraction from work that isn't just the TV. I let Taima beat me on the racing game we played together, I could've won if I'd wanted to, I just chose not to. I could easily win!

Oh shush!

Sunday, October 26th to Saturday, November 1st 2014

I got into the office on Monday morning to find the Didcot part time police were already there. Some morons had broken into the office over the weekend, and completely vandalised it. Trashed all the computers, spray paint on the big screen TV we use to watch the news on, they set fire to a filing cabinet full of papers, and the other cabinets were upended and the papers are all over the place. Thankfully the fire hadn't taken hold or there would have been nothing left. The boss was looking devastated. The filing cabinet that was destroyed had a copy of every single issue of the paper we'd ever published, back to the very first. Probably the only copies of most of the papers, the bosses years of work, all destroyed. I still don't like the guy but he looked broken, he just sat there and stared into space.

We were all sent home, there was no way to do a print run this week, the computers, with all the software, had all been thrown around the room.

I have a horrible feeling I'll be needing another job. Even if the insurance comes through quickly, there's no way they can set it all back up before the company runs out of money. I don't know much about the company finances, but I suspect that we run pretty close to the edge most of the time.

Then of course, bad went to worse. I was on the way home, just

dropping Taima a message to let her know what had happened, and some complete fuckwit wasn't looking where he was going, and he walked into me. I dropped my pad and smashed the screen. It had survived being thrown out of an upstairs window at the B&B, but this time, I drop it from a metre, and it dies. Typical. It's going to be £200 to replace the screen, and I'll be without a pad for a week. I'm voicing this into the pad now, and trying not to get glass on my fingers as I hold it. Stupid fuckwit just said 'oh sorry, are you OK' and walked off, before I could even reply. I guess he realised he'd made me drop my pad, and didn't want to get landed with the bill for repairing it. I hope he chokes on his dishonesty, I really do. If it had been me, I'd have stopped and given him my number, so we could work out how I could repay him for the damage, but I guess honesty and being nice is a dying thing in this country.

Anyway, this will be my last entry for a week now, as I need to send the pad off to be repaired. No idea where I'm going to find £200, and even if I can, will I still have a job this time next week? I honestly don't know. I wish I hadn't bought that PS4 now, we can't afford it, and it was frivolous, stupid of me.

Sunday, November 2nd to Saturday, November 8th 2014

Tuesday

My pad came back today, and I have to say, I take back my negative feelings from this time last week.

Sometimes, some people do restore your faith in humanity. Not often, but sometimes.

Monday afternoon last week, the boss got a call from the Oxford Daily. They'd heard what had happened, and offered to let us use their equipment. It meant we'd have to go in at night, when they weren't using it, and some of their kit was a bit different to ours - they tended to have newer and better stuff than some of the clapped-out rubbish we had - but we managed. We managed to get our weekly

edition out on time last week. I can't begin to tell you how much I like those guys at the Oxford Daily, they didn't have to do this, but they did, and they supplied coffee and energy drinks so we could work through the night. Those guys are awesome, they're the kind of paper I want to be working at.

So here we are, Tuesday evening, and I'm just about to start work for the day. The night. You know what I mean.

Wednesday

The plus side of working nights right now is that I can go cover the fireworks tonight and it's in work hours. I took Taima out to the display in Didcot. It was a modest affair, but it was fun. We stood outside in the freezing cold, waiting for the rain to start, and amazingly, it didn't, and we got a twenty minute display. OK some of the fireworks looked like they came from the Tesco bargain bin, but it's a small town, that's part of the charm. London will be spending a hundred grand on their fireworks on Saturday, I expect, and Didcot probably spent no more than a hundred pounds. Quaint, is the word. We'll go off to Oxford to see bigger fireworks at the weekend. I'm glad Didcot does theirs on the night instead of on the closest Saturday, it means we get to go to two displays!

Saturday

I wrote an article on Thursday, just in time for the deadline, about community spirit, which talked about the break in, the vandalising of the office, and the extremely generous help from the Oxford Daily. I didn't get edited a single word, as I think everyone is so relieved to still have a job right now, all of my gushing praise was happily let through. Another bonus about working overnight at the Daily, as we don't have to send the files off to Oxford, and get them proofed and agreed on and sent forth, sent back who knows how many times, the deadline for print is almost a whole day later. This makes my work a whole lot easier!

This evening, we headed into Oxford for the town's firework

display. It was great. I have to admit though, I didn't see much of it. In a highly uncharacteristic display, Taima beckoned me to follow when we were in the crowd, and she led me off to a more deserted part of the field, where she revealed she was wearing some rather fun new underwear - and that's all she was wearing underneath her long coat. It was cold, but we didn't really feel the cold, and the fireworks made a very exciting accompaniment, we were both nervous as hell about being caught, and that made it even better. I have to say, that may be one of the most exciting half hours I've ever had. Especially when the fireworks finished before we did, and people started to leave the field, some of them walking only metres from us as they left. We weren't discovered, but I'm pretty sure we weren't going to stop even if we were!

Wow.

Sunday, November 9th to Saturday, November 15th 2014

I lost most of Sunday in a bit of a haze after Saturday night, I was walking round with a big grin on my face. Then on Sunday evening, she dragged me out to Didcot high street. There's a row of houses with hedges, and we did it again, right opposite Pizza Hut, right in someone's front garden. They were home, we could see the TV flickering in the front room, if anyone had looked out of the front window, we'd have been busted! We could see people just on the other side of the hedge walking in and out of the Pizza Hut across the road, and there we were, just metres away, mostly undressed, and certainly breaking several laws!

I don't quite know what's gotten into Taima, but I like it! I really do!

In the end Monday came, and work reared its head again. The new retirement age law was passed in parliament, and signed into law. The boss was obviously cranky about that, but that was to be expected. Taima had a job interview on Monday in Reading, so she left in the

morning, while I was still sleeping, getting ready for more overnight work in Oxford. She still wasn't home when I left for work at 9pm, which worried me a bit, but she emailed me at about 11 to say she was home safe. I got home and she was still awake, watching TV. She said the interview had seemed to go really well, but she didn't seem to be in a great mood, so I didn't push it. I guess the last few days are over now, and back to normal domestic bliss.

On Tuesday, I managed to completely miss the big news by not checking the net before I left home, and got into the office to find everyone from the Daily still working, and the Didcot Gazette staff all sitting around in the canteen.

It turns out, that in protest at the new retirement age laws, the Liberal Democrats had quit the ConDem alliance, sorry, the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government, and Labour had promptly called a confidence vote. The Tories had managed to lose the vote, and in doing so had forced a general election. The date had been set for December 4th, and everyone in the Oxford Daily was working through the night to get articles written for the morning edition.

At about midnight, the boss told us to all go home, we weren't getting any work done tonight with the Daily guys all hogging the computers. OK so they were their computers, but all the same, they could have gone home at some point and let us on! Thankfully he wasn't as grumpy as he could be, as the insurance money had come through and the office was being re-fitted with new equipment back in Didcot. Even at the worst, we should be back in the office by next week.

Wednesday

Taima got the job! She is now officially a teacher at South Reading Academy. I was so excited for her, more excited that she seemed to be, I think! She starts next week, replacing another teacher who was fired. I didn't want to go into work tonight, I'd much rather have stayed home and help her celebrate, but she told me she needed to try and work on some lesson plans, so I left her to it and headed into work.

Everything was chaos at the Daily. Luckily I don't really need a computer, I just use my pad for my articles, but the editors and photographers (all two of each) were bounced from computer to computer as various Daily staff members came in and went out. I sat in the corner and voiced an article about the election for this weeks edition. It wasn't exciting enough to insert here, it really wasn't, it was quite long, quite full of statistics, and to my amazement, the boss said he'd have it as the front page article.

My first front page, I'm so excited! I went over the story a dozen times with Debby, changing a bit here, a bit there. She was pleased for me that I'd got the front page, we've been getting on much better since the road accident, and she turned out to be nice instead of just the editor that put me down all the while. I think we did good work. It was still boring and full of stats and numbers, but it flowed well, and was a good piece of journalism.

Thursday

The polls have started to come in, and not surprisingly, it's looking like it'll be close. Labour on 39%, Conservative on 37%, 6% Lib Dems, 9% for UKIP, and 9% other. That's a pretty disastrous number for the Lib Dems, who got 23% last election, and it doesn't look good for the Tories either, although 37% is up a little it on their share from last election, they look like they'll be losing out to Labour this election. What surprises me though is UKIP, they got a whole 3% last election, and they're up to 9%, that's a big surprise.

My front page is going to print tonight, for tomorrows distribution run. I've had to concentrate on other articles though, or I'll spend all night tweaking and re-writing it, when it's already doing the job.

Sunday, November 16th to Saturday, November 22nd 2014

Taima started her new job this week. She's teaching maths to the 11-16 year age range. Rather her than me. At that age they're all full of hormones, don't care about school, and run wild if they get the

chance. She's worked really hard the last few days trying to prepare for the classes. The old teacher who was fired left absolutely nothing in terms of lesson plans. No surprise there, if you get fired you're probably not the best teacher in the world, so why would you have plans available for your successor. It's meant she's had to put in extra hours ever since the job was offered. She's spent all day, every day, in Reading, and I barely saw her all weekend. I'll be glad when it settles down a little, but I don't begrudge her her work, she moved here to help me with my career, it is the least I can do to offer her the same level of support.

On Monday she looked really nervous when she left. I did my best to distract her, but I don't think she was really in the mood to be distracted. By 7am she was out of the flat, and I went back to bed for an hour.

Monday in the office, I think we were all impressed. The insurance payout had been generous, and the new set up was really nice. All of the new equipment was brand new, and it all just worked. The set up before the break-in was all cobbled together and would break down on a daily basis. The new stuff just hummed along and did its job perfectly. I could sync my pad to the office network just by walking into the office now, instead of fighting with it for half an hour just to transfer some files. This will make work so much easier.

I have to admit that that evening I was annoyed. I know I shouldn't be, but I went to a whole load of effort, I actually cooked Taima's favourite dinner, amazingly without burning it either. She got in late from work and was so tired that she wasn't hungry and went straight to bed. We didn't get to talk about her first day, I ate my half of the food, which isn't MY favourite so I didn't really enjoy much, and then I just watched TV and fumed a bit while she slept.

By midweek, I was heartily sick of TV adverts from the political parties. I'm glad that unlike US elections our politicians don't actually have that much money, and so we're somewhat limited in the number of ads we have to endure, but even those ones were driving me mad. Every few minutes one of the big three parties would be on TV telling

us how they're great and the others are all just lying and after our votes for nefarious reasons. As if anyone believes *any* of them. We're just going to pick the one that we feel will do least damage, and annoys us least, and we'll just have to hope we'll survive the next few years till the next election. Democracy isn't great really, I'd be all for a benevolent dictatorship, a single leader who gets things done, no opposition, just does what needs to be done. Unfortunately that kind of power always seems to be corrupting in the end, I can't recall a single supreme leader who ended up being a good guy. Shame really, it would be by far the best way of doing things, if we could avoid the corruption.

By the end of the week, Taima seemed to be a bit more relaxed again. She apologised for being grumpy on Monday, which I didn't really care about, I was just glad to see she was feeling a bit better. Apparently the classes had been rough, and the kids no better than savages. Well, she may have exaggerated there, but from the dishevelled look she often comes home with, probably not by much. We made up for the blown Monday dinner by going out on Friday night. With two incomes, we'll be able to afford to eat out a bit more often now, and maybe even spend a little money on those luxuries in life.

That would be nice.

Sunday, November 23rd to Saturday, November 29th 2014

I got Sunday to myself this week, as Taima was off visiting her parents for her mother's birthday. I played some games on the PS4, and vegged in front of the TV. I didn't even put the news on until late. Glad I didn't because the news was disappointing. The NASA Mars rover, *Curiosity*, had failed. Apparently it had been driving, and there was an unexpected subsidence, and the rover fell into a deep hole. It was still functional, but, being down a hole could only communicate very infrequently when either a satellite was overhead, or the rotation of Mars had it pointing directly at the Earth. And - being down a hole

- it was fairly much pointless, with no science it could do, and no more exploring. There were a lot of long faces in the NASA press briefing, and I share their disappointment. But saying that, they should quit with robots and send people to Mars. If a human falls down a hole, they can climb out again, instead of just saying 'well, that's me dead then.' I'd go if they asked me. I think that they need some British press on the mission, it may be essential to success! Anyone want my number?

No? Well, fine then, be like that! :-)

I was thinking of bed when Taima got home, she had blood on her, and I was pretty freaked till she told me it wasn't hers. She'd been walking back from the train station, and found a cat that had been badly injured, probably by a car. She'd picked it up and carried it to the vet's surgery. The cat had no collar, no chip, no way to identify it. She's told the vet to try and save it, so there goes her first month's salary. But it's her money and she could spend it on worse things. A bit of human kindness every now and again is never a bad thing, we could do with more of it.

I didn't mention to her that we quite desperately need her wages to pay rent this month, I'll just have to let the payment bounce, and hope the landlord doesn't get too pissy about it. We'll only be a couple of days late between when rent should be due, and when my wages go into the account, so I can't see it being a huge deal. Thankfully we have a freezer full of food, but we'll be late on the PS4 loan repayment, and the council tax. It's a damned good thing she got that job, even if her first paycheque is blown, I've been trying to avoid thinking about money for a while, I've been sticking my head in the sand a bit. But hooray, it's all good now, new job, new income, we'll be fine.

I won't bother going into much detail about work this week, it was all election election election. Yawn yawn yawn. How exciting can I make a story about a 1% shift in the polls? Answer: not very. No wonder people hate the press at election time, and here I am, I'm not part of the solution, I'm part of the problem :-)

Taima spent several evenings this week down at the vet's with the injured cat. I have a horrible feeling that we're going to end up adopting this thing. I'm more a dog than a cat person, but if it makes her happy, I won't put up too much of a fight. I'll argue a bit about it, I don't want her to just think I'll cave at the first demand, but it isn't important enough to put up a real fight over. To be honest I'm surprised it's still alive. From how Taima first described it, I was expecting it to be an ex-cat by now. But nope, it's still hanging on. It lost a chunk of tail and one eye when it was hurt, but it does seem to be pulling through. I haven't even seen this moggy and already it's costing money and time, not the most auspicious start.

Sunday, November 30th to Saturday, December 6th 2014

Monday

Election week. And will I be glad when it's over. For a group of political parties with limited budgets, they've managed to really plaster their message wall to wall over the TV these last few days before the election.

New unemployment figures came out today, and how conveniently, unemployment is down by 0.7%, the lowest value in the last nine months. How shocking that unemployment is down three days before the election, whoever saw that coming, I sure didn't. I'm surprised they didn't fix it - I mean find it - even lower.

It worries me that the election polls are showing UKIP so far ahead of where they were last time. I don't like all of the right wing nationalistic stuff they sprout, we need to work together to solve problems not be all isolationist and 'screw everyone else, we're just gonna help ourselves'. I hope it's a temporary blip and that everyone opens their eyes a bit and realises we're one island in a pretty big world, and we can't just ignore everyone else.

Wednesday. Election day

Work was pretty much a non-event today, everyone is waiting for the election results. I'm at home, with Taima, and popcorn. We're on the sofa in front of the TV, and I'm typing, as she poked me in the ribs when I started to use voice to enter this.

As always Sunderland South was first to declare, and they've stayed Labour, 38% of the vote, Conservative 28%, UKIP 16%, Lib Dems 6%, and then a spattering of other candidates getting the rest, including a Monster Raving Loony candidate with 207 votes. I do like to see the Loony candidates, this one is in a banana suit with a big Stetson hat on the top of the banana. Call UK politics what you like, but we can laugh at ourselves better than anyone else in the world.

As the evening progressed, the result that took shape was a surprise to pretty much everyone, and by the end of the night, we knew that the Tories had gained enough seats to form a new government, and the Lib Dems had been butchered, knocked into fourth place by UKIP. David Cameron's acceptance speech was a typical, nothing speciOW!

I have no idea what just happened, I just sliced open my hand on my glass a few minutes ago. I think I clutched it too hard and it broke, I just heard Cameron's speech and wanted to break the smug git's nose, and my hand hurt, and I'd clenched my hand around my glass. I'm just voicing this before Taima carts me off to A&E, as there's quite a bit of blood. It doesn't hurt though, I'm more just surprised. I don't even know why I was so angry at him, he's not doing anything I haven't seen PMs do many times before.

Thursday

We waited forever in the hospital A&E. With the budget cuts over recent years it seems that the waiting times get longer and longer. I was seen in the end, it must have been after about seven hours. Luckily the bleeding wasn't too bad after the first 20 minutes, so I survived, and I expect if I'd been gushing they would have prioritised me.

I was seen by a doctor who looked like she'd seen about 300 people already, and looked really run down and tired. She bandaged

up my hand, just a few stitches, and gave me some painkillers. She then booked me an appointment with Dr. Smith, the psychologist I'd stopped seeing a couple of months ago. I tried to explain that Dr. Smith is a psychologist not my GP or anything, but the doctor insisted that in my patient file, were instructions to refer me back to her. They dished out a weeks worth of painkillers, but said I'd have to see Dr. Smith to get more. Great, so now I have to go to a doctor I don't need or really like, to be able to get painkillers for an injury that isn't her speciality. The NHS is a mess, a right mess. At least the glass is all out though, and apparently there's no long term damage done, so there's that at least.

So anyway, back to the election, who cares about my cuts and bruises. Before the evening started, I don't think anyone would have bet against Labour winning, even if they had to form a new coalition with the Liberal Democrats, but the Conservatives have somehow managed to pull it off, and David Cameron is back as the Prime Minister, and this time without having to get the backing of the Lib Dems to do his job. I don't think anyone at all is surprised that the Lib Dems have been almost wiped off the map, only 12 seats went to them compared to 57 last election. Joining forces with the Tories, and especially their U-turn on tuition fees for universities which pretty much alienated their entire core vote among the students, and they were doomed. To be quite frank, I'm amazed they got twelve seats, I'd have expected more like none, but I guess a political party can only self-combust so much.

So this means another five years of the austerity program, which hasn't worked so far, but economists still seem to think it's the best bet for long term prosperity. I don't know, I'm not an economist, but I'd like to think they know what they're talking about, and the pain now will be worth it in the end.

UKIP with 16%, that shocks me, but it doesn't surprise me. When things go badly in the economy, there is always a swing to the right. Every developed country in the world has seen it, Germany even has a 'neo-Nazi' candidate holding a seat in their parliament, and for modern Germany that's just crazy. I remember there was such an uproar when that happened last year. At least the BNP seems to have lost some ground. Those guys are borderline fascists themselves, and

I live in dread for the day they get their hands on any actual power in this country, it would be a day of shame.

Cameron's face looked pretty smug, and who can blame him. 'The British public have spoken' he said, as he unceremoniously kicked every Liberal Democrat out of the cabinet, and back to the opposition's back benches. Not that there are many of them left that were part of the government last time. Nick Clegg lost his seat, and he was party leader, and deputy Prime Minister until yesterday, now he's unemployed. I expect the party will find some work for him, and he'll try and get his seat back next election, but how embarrassing to lose your leader. How careless. They made William Hague deputy Prime Minister, not a bad recovery for a previous leader of the party who was blamed for losing an election he really should have won a few years back. He was considered unemployable, and now he's back and second in command.

I won't bore you with the rest of the details - more to the point I really can't be bothered to get the list up on the pad. I mean, it won't mean anything, just more of the same as the last four years, doesn't really matter whose face is on the front of it, it's all Cameron.

Sunday, December 7th to Saturday, December 13th 2014

More politics all week, I ended up glad to do a story on the list of proposals for the new power plant to be built on the site of Didcot-A that was knocked down a while ago. It's a mix of renewable proposals, another big coal plant, though why build one of those when you just knocked one down, and a plan for a nuclear plant. I can't see the nuclear plant getting anywhere, not so close to Oxford, and not to mention, it would have to use the Thames for its water supply. Anyone doing the research knows that nuclear plants don't cause radiation unless something goes wrong, but the idea of using Thames water, and then the Thames heading off into London, yeah I doubt it'll happen, no matter how safe it is. Londoners will kick up the worlds biggest stink if it gets serious consideration.

On Thursday, the expected fight happened, Taima brought the cat

home from the vet. I gave in fairly quickly to be honest. The cat is quite cute and did win me over a little. Only having one eye, it squints a lot, and that was cute, it looks like it's frowning all the time, all so serious. It's a black and white patchwork cat, no name yet, we'll see if it lives to the end of the month before giving it a name, I think. No point getting attached if it - he - will end up not making it.

Friday was the doctors appointment with Dr. Smith the psychologist. She sat me down and we talked. She asked me why I hadn't made the last appointment we had back in October, and I was honest and said that I felt it was a bit of a waste of time, she'd not even talked about the motorway accident that I'd been there to see her about.

She told me she didn't need to talk about the accident, nor did I, and she'd been trying to help me find why the accident was still on my mind. I tried to tell her it isn't on my mind any more, but she insisted it was. I replied that I should know what's on my mind, and I hadn't thought about it in weeks before she brought it up again.

Her response was to tell me that if it hadn't been on my mind, I wouldn't have ended up in the A&E last week, which is even crazier. I've started to wonder if she isn't that good at her job, because she certainly seems to have no idea what she's doing when we talk.

I ended up promising to go back next Friday. I will go, but honestly, I'm wasting my time, I could be doing better things on a Friday evening.

Saturday we went out shopping. The work's Christmas do is on Monday, and they've decided on a 'formal dinner' and I haven't got anything formal, nor has Taima, so we now have to go spend several hundred pounds on clothes we'll almost never wear again to go to an event we don't really want to go to, using money we don't have. What an awesomely fun time. I was more grumpy than she was, she does like clothes shopping. OK what woman doesn't, but she really enjoys it. It seems she enjoys it more the more expensive the clothes are. I don't know if it's because they're better, they look nicer, or it's purely because they're more expensive. Some parts of a woman's psyche are meant to be unknown to men, I just wish it was one of the cheaper

parts, as her clothes cost over £250, mine cost £75. Still, saying that, she did look very very - very - good in them.

Sunday, December 14th to Saturday, December 20th 2014

The Christmas party came and went on Monday. Everyone else had gone to the same kind of effort we had, although I expect, as I'm the youngest person in the company, most of the others already had their expensive stuff, and didn't have to break the bank to be there. Our proofreader, Alan, looked like his tux had seen better days, that's for sure. We spent most of the evening chatting to Floyd, the photographer I'm friends with, and his wife whose name I honestly can't remember. I didn't drink much, I never do, but Taima, uncharacteristically for her, did. For a non-practising Muslim who feels uncomfortable around bacon, she seemed to have no problem ignoring the rules they have on alcohol. She was most unwell and her new dress needed to go to the dry cleaners. We had to leave early because she'd just packed drinks down all night. I'm a bit shocked at her, in all the time I've known her, I've never seen her even get merry on drinks, let alone paralytic.

I had another of my articles rejected this week, on the basis it had zero local interest, which is kindof true, but I still felt it was important. I picked up a Reuters news feed article about the South Asian Vulture becoming extinct. I'd have expected Vultures to be the last animals on the planet to die off, living on carrion as they do, but it turns out that this was their downfall.

Farmers in India had been feeding a chemical called diclofenac to their cattle. It's an anti-inflammatory drug, and the farmers dish it out by the bucket load as a general painkiller for their animals. The problem arose from the cattle who died with the drug in their system, and were fed on by the vultures. It turned out to be fatal to the birds in a matter of hours, days at the outside. In the last fifteen years, the population fell from millions, to none today. Some of the vultures survive in captivity, but in the wild, they're gone, another species lost due to careless human activity.

But, the story wasn't relevant. I even tried to hook in local farming practices, but I was told in no uncertain terms that comparing farmers in Oxfordshire to those in India wasn't going to happen, 'not in this paper, not in my lifetime.'

Typical closed-minded attitude from the boss.

Instead I ended up writing a column on the choking dangers of boiled sweets for children. In today's politically correct society, it's sure to be a hot topic sooner or later.

I got my hand bandage off, and it seems to have healed up a lot. Still a load of scabs, long lines from the cuts right across my palms. If I was into palm-reading, I'd be worried as I'm sure it cuts through all of the major lines, but that's not my thing and so I'm not at all concerned. If I do suddenly drop dead next week though, tell the palm readers they may be onto something!

The new cat, cat of no name, still has his bandages on his tail and a cone on his head to stop him licking or pulling the bandages off. He isn't very active, mostly just lies there on a beanbag we got for him. He looks a bit scared to be honest. We're trying to give him some attention and get him to relax, but I think he's probably still in a lot of pain so isn't likely to relax for a while until he trusts we won't hurt him.

End of the week, I hit another problem. We ran out of money. I had to go to one of those nasty 'payday loans' companies on the high street, where you get a couple of hundred pounds, and have to pay double back in six weeks. I always laughed at people who used them, but there was a long line of people in the shop as I joined the ranks of the desperate. Any other month I wouldn't do it, but I haven't got Taima's Christmas pressie yet, and regardless of how broke we are, life wouldn't be worth living if I just said 'sorry, can't afford one this year.'

Friday evening, as I'd promised I went back to see Dr. Smith. She had me go through the night of the election, when I injured my hand,

in minute detail. I told her that the injury happened when the PM finished his acceptance speech, and was obviously because I hadn't liked something he'd said, although I have no real idea what, and I can't see how this relates to anything. Everyone gets annoyed at politicians, and at worst I could do with an anger management course or something.

She told me that anger management wasn't the issue, the issue was PTSD, caused by the shock several months ago of expecting to see a few dented cars, and walking into a place where a half dozen people had died in gruesome ways. What she'd been trying to help me find was what kept me thinking about it. What had made me lose control on election night, and at times before when I'd been angry at people recently.

She told me things like that can often affect us in ways we don't expect, and asked me to go through the other times I'd felt violent or angry before.

I mentioned the time when I threw my pad out of the window in the B&B when I was escaping from Taima's smothering, and she asked me to discuss what had happened.

I told her I'd been watching some live music festival on TV, I hadn't been that interested in it, but it was better than watching some of the other stuff that was on that night. And I'd just felt angrier and angrier as the show went on, obviously because Taima hadn't replied to the email I'd sent her some time earlier.

I started to get annoyed at Dr. Smith at that point, she didn't even seem to be listening, she was stretching her arms over her head, just looking up and staring at her hands as she did so, paying no attention to what I was saying. I asked her if I was boring her, and why the hell didn't she do her job and listen and solve the issue.

I feel bad now, for raising my voice like that, because she was doing her job. She was being sure of her theory of my problem. And she told me what was wrong.

Written Saturday evening

I spent a lot of time today thinking about it, and it seems much clearer now. It was the clapping at the music, it was her focussing on her arms, it was the applause at the PM's speech, it was people using

their arms, like the poor guy – I never saw the person at the accident, but like his arm that was lying in the road. He'll never clap again, and how easy it is to have things taken away without notice. He'd been just driving along minding his own business, and he'll never be able to clap again. That could happen to anyone, it could happen to me next time I leave my flat. I hadn't thought about it, but it was scaring me. I didn't even know it was, but I'd responded to fear with anger.

It's strange to think about. Logically, I can see the link, I can see why, but I don't know deep down why I reacted that way. I know Dr. Smith is right, but in my brain it doesn't really make sense. She's told me that I'll understand it in time, and knowing the problem is a good way towards solving it. I need to not let my emotions about that poor guys arm get away from me, I need to put it away and try and let it heal itself over time, she said.

I'll be back there in the new year. I don't think she's working over the Christmas break, and who can blame her. But for now, I need to just keep my eye on it, make sure if I start to get angry again, I take a step back and understand where it comes from.

Sunday, December 21st to Wednesday, December 31st 2014

It's a good job the Sunday trading laws were relaxed last year, or I'd have been doomed with a capital D. I went and did my Christmas shopping on the Sunday, got something for Taima, Floyd, my parents, and had some change to buy a tree.

Wow, I sound like a Dickens novel there don't I. Had some change to buy a tree. Quick, I need to find a passing urchin and have him buy us a goose too! Oi, I'm becoming a living stereotype of myself. Let us never speak of this again.

Monday evening we went out and watched the new Hobbit film. We'd been waiting ages for it, and it didn't disappoint. We've both read the book, so there were no real surprises, but the whole thing was just spectacular. It's just a shame there was no more Stephen Fry. I know his part was done and finished with in the last film, but it was still a shame.

We spent Christmas day at home. It was the first Christmas we'd spent together, as while at uni we'd both usually gone back to see parents in the holidays. I liked it, it was a new thing, and Taima seemed to really relax. I think the new job is stressing her quite a bit, and getting two weeks off really made a difference for her. I've just got a week and a half off, as the paper shuts down for a week on the 24th, so I don't have to go back till Jan 5th.

During the week between Christmas and new year, it snowed. Shame it couldn't have been a bit earlier and given us a white Christmas, but you can't have everything. The snow came down thick and fast for three days. We ended up with over 70cm of snow, and it was drifting even deeper. Taima's evident relaxation being on a break from work, along with her new-found sexually adventuresome spirit, became evident when in the middle of a snowstorm, we went out to the town's park in the middle of the day and carved ourselves a much packed down little niche in the snow, where we could have been caught really easily. Not even a bush to shield us this time, just the depth of the snow, and we could hear people walking not too far away. It was incredibly exciting, the risk of getting caught just seemed to switch on every nerve in my whole body, I was shaking with excitement before we'd even begun!

We spent New Year's at home. I downloaded a 3D fireplace for the TV, and put a fan heater behind it, so it almost felt like a log fire. Except for the noisy fan heater. We switched it off because yeah it gave heat to the fake fire, but it really broke the mood.

Midnight is almost here, and I think that Taima is planning to celebrate the new year with more than just a kiss, so you know, I'm stopping recording here until next year. Happy New Year to all of you readers who've bought my diary, and have stuck with it for the first year! May there be many more!