

CHRONICLE



2018

Andrew Woodmaker

**An old enemy will rise,
and the country will be tested.**

In this fifth year's worth of entries from a diary stored on a futuristic recording device found after a house fire, a desperate gambit is played by a failing nation.

In 2018, the source of the Mecca bomb is identified, but do the investigators have an ulterior motive?

Andrew Woodmaker is rebuilding his life and taking his job in a new direction, as the nation gets its first view of the new British spaceplane.

Nobody knows if this 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.

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by

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MSP Publishing

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Dedicated to Rion and Francesca

They're the best brother and sister I have...

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.

Monday, January 1st to Saturday, January 6th 2018

New Year's Day, the start of what I desperately hope will be a better year for me. I've watched the fireworks on TV, it still looks strange seeing them for the last couple of years without the London Eye that they always used to be based around. They'd kitted out Big Ben this year, and loads of fireworks were set off from there. It amused me to think of how the conversation arranging that would have gone.

'Yeah, we'd like to bring loads of explosives into the Houses of Parliament, we're going to set them off on New Years Eve. Yeah, it's perfectly safe, this is Mr Fawkes, who'll be in charge of them.'

I watched some more of the fireworks in different time zones throughout the night, the ones in New York were good, probably trying to distract people from how expensive their oil is right now.

I fell asleep on the sofa sometime before California's fireworks, and woke up with CoNN sleeping on my face so I couldn't breathe. What I don't get, is why I didn't wake up sooner? He was sound asleep so he'd obviously been there for a while, so why hadn't I woken up when a furry clawing beast landed on my face in the first place?

Anyway, I was awake. I put on the news, and almost fell back to sleep again. The news was a mix of Happy New Year, and Lithuania adopting the Euro as of midnight. Neither of which were keeping me awake. I had to feed CoNN though, so I got up, found his food, and puttered around the house for the rest of the day.

Tuesday I was back at work. Nothing had really changed since I was last there three weeks ago, no surprise there. I sat at my desk, and just had complete writers block. I looked at my emails, I looked at the news feeds, nothing inspired me. I guess that after three weeks off, I hadn't come back feeling refreshed, I'd come back catatonic. I didn't get a single word onto paper all day. Well, onto my pad, but you know what I mean, it's a phrase, metaphorical, not literal.

I wasn't too worried, everyone takes a while to get back into the swing of things after some time off. I'd hoped to go back in and be

immediately inspired to new heights of creativity, get the front page every day, and change the world. Still, I rearranged my desk nicely, it's much more efficiently organised now.

Wednesday I went into work and, crap, again, no motivation. Two days in a row wasn't a good sign. Maybe the last 18 months had caught up with me and I was having a brain meltdown to match the meltdown in my face. I didn't need this to happen, I really didn't.

Wednesday night, I gave myself a kick up the arse, and had a think about what I could do to sort myself out. It wasn't just the work thing, it was everything. My life was in a rut, and work was just a manifestation of the problem. I spent all my time at home, just me and the cat. I didn't interact with anyone outside of work, and I was going nowhere.

Don't get me wrong, I'm an introvert, and I have no problem with that. A quarter of the people in the world are introverts, but introvert isn't the same as hermit. I like and need my quiet time, time to myself to recharge and relax, but I'd had too much of it. I was in a loop and just living day to day with no goals and no ambitions. A couple of years ago I was full of ambition and drive, and had more goals than I could juggle. I'd toppled governments, I'd discovered conspiracies, and I'd changed the world. Mecca had taken everything from me, and I didn't even try and find new goals, I just lived. I carried on breathing. And that was enough, or so it had seemed.

It wasn't. It really wasn't. And so I'm doing something about it.

My first step - get out of the house once a week.

I joined the local gym. I'm not a health freak, I'm not even that healthy, I spend most of my time on my backside either working or at home, and I get way too little exercise. The gym seemed like a good way to get out of the house, and get some endorphins into my system. It seemed like a really good thing, and for £40 a month, while it wasn't cheap, it was affordable.

I suppose I could have just jogged a couple of times round the block and saved myself the money, but the goal was also to *try* and be

sociable there, meet new people, make new friends, despite my natural discomfort of doing exactly that.

I went into work on Thursday with, to coin a phrase, an improved mental attitude, and I got an article done. I wrote about pets, unwanted Christmas presents, that were dumped at the animal shelters in vast droves this time of year. How many times do they say 'Don't buy pets for people for Christmas'? And yet still people do it, all the time, and come the new year, they're abandoned.

I don't get it, don't the people that buy the puppies and kittens wonder where they got to? Why is it that little Suzie no longer has that cute puppy we just bought her last week? Isn't anyone even curious?

It just strikes me as odd. But then, it strikes me as odd that anyone treats animals in that kind of way. I reckon people should have to pass a test, make sure they know what they're getting into before they're allowed a pet. That would cut down on problems, for sure.

I went home on Thursday evening in a better mood, my article done, and I played with CoNN for a while, until he got annoyed with my over-attention and retreated under the bed.

Friday I did another piece on the Falklands, as Argentina were being asshats again.

Since we'd seen off their patrol boat last year, Argentina had been grumpy as anything at us. Their latest trick has been another way of trying to build up support back home.

Argentina in violation of Falkland Islands' airspace

Starting Tuesday, the Argentinian government, in a desperate attempt to use national patriotism to deflect their people's attention from their economic failures, have started the latest in a string of actions designed to raise tensions over the Falkland Islands.

The Argentinians are offering tickets for free on their "Flight of Patriots", where they send a Boeing 737 packed with 200 passengers to fly over the Falklands, so people can see just what 'the colonial

British have stolen from us.’

When this first happened on Tuesday, the RAF responded by first warning the plane to divert from Falklands airspace, before launching two Typhoon fighters to intercept the aircraft.

The 737 apparently simply ignored the fighters, overflying Stanley, before turning round to return to Argentina, overflying RAF Mount Pleasant in the process.

Thankfully the incident didn’t escalate, with the RAF holding fire, and allowing the passenger plane to make its journey.

The Argentinian ambassador to the UK was summoned to explain himself, but as has been the habit recently, the ambassador has ignored the summons and remained in his embassy.

Yesterday the whole process repeated itself, with two Typhoon fighters once again escorting the passenger plane while it was within Falklands airspace.

While this violation of British sovereignty is blatant, it seems there is little that can be done, unless the RAF is willing to shoot down a passenger plane full of patriotic Argentinian tourists, and this is highly unlikely to happen.

In Argentina, thousands have signed up to receive the free trip, and so it seems that this latest exercise will go on for some time.

Sunday, January 7th to Saturday, January 13th 2018

I’d been thinking for a while, especially since the three weeks off work I’ve just had, about getting a new cat to keep CoNN company while I’m at work. Well, I finally got the ball rolling on that on Tuesday.

I went to the local animal shelter, the one I’d done a couple of

stories on last year after they got a big donation from a local man's will. Despite the fact that they already knew me, and I'd interviewed the owner, Christina, just last year about the donation, they wanted to know just about everything about my life before they'd let me adopt a new cat. I had to fill in a ten page questionnaire, and have someone come to look at my flat, before I could be approved. I was expecting them to ask for blood samples next.

Once they'd done all that, they promised to get back to me as soon as possible. I just shook my head in a mixture of exasperation and acceptance. I hadn't expected the Spanish Inquisition.

Wednesday the news was back in the Falklands, as the trial of the six British oil workers and the three crew of their boat began in Buenos Aires.

I was expecting the trial to be a farce, but the reports from the court case, which wasn't televised, seemed to indicate that, at least to start with, the trial had seemed to be fair and balanced.

Friday came, and I finally got the word from the animal shelter that I was 'authorised' to re-home one of their cats. How nice of them. I know they're just being responsible, but I could have adopted a small child from Africa for less paperwork.

I picked up the cat after work, and carried her home on the train. Great start to the poor thing's new life, being scared, in a cage, and with no familiar surroundings. Even CoNN, when he was on the train last month, had had a familiar face to keep him calm.

The new cat, who'll pick up a name once her personality shows what it should be, is black, has a really thin rat-like tail, and is quite small for her age, which the shelter told me is about eight or nine months old. I wanted a younger cat, so that CoNN would feel less threatened by her, but not so young that she'd need excess looking after.

I got her home and opened up the cage where CoNN could see, so he knew that the newcomer wasn't some interloper, but was invited. The new cat hid in the back of the carry cage and didn't want to come out, so CoNN went to investigate.

He wasn't impressed. He hissed and made some threatening meows, and I had to tap him on the nose to be nicer. He looked *most*

offended at that, and he skulked off under the bed and wouldn't come out.

The introductions weren't going at all to plan.

I left a small plate with half a small tin of salmon for the new cat in front of the carry cage, and another plate with the rest of the tin for CoNN, which I placed under the bed for him, so he could eat it without coming back out.

Then I did the only thing I could do. I went to watch TV and leave them to it. No point in trying to force a cat to do something it doesn't want to do.

I watched some news on the trial. It was really all about the politics, as there was no doubt that the people on trial had been working for the oil company. The big question was, would the court follow Argentinian domestic law, or would they follow international law which recognised the Falklands as British.

I had little doubt they'd follow Argentinian law. I mean, if the Argentinians can't even fix a trial in their own country, it would be a pretty poor show.

I looked out into the bedroom after an hour or so to see both cats sitting at opposite sides of the room, intently staring at each other. I don't think they were blinking even, it was like a contest of wills, and I had the feeling that CoNN, with just one eye, would be at a disadvantage.

I ignored them for the rest of the evening, did my usual stuff, and went to bed at about 11. At that point they were both in exactly the same places, but both were curled up asleep. Or at least pretending to be. CoNN jumped up onto the bed when I got in, and demanded attention, and the new cat sat back up and watched. CoNN is *not* an attention needing cat, and he never jumps up on the bed when I go to sleep, and so I suspect he was marking his territory, and that territory was me.

In the morning, the new cat was gone from the bedroom. I had a quick look round the house and couldn't find her anywhere. I had to have a quick check of the cat flap, and no, I'd definitely remembered to lock it before bringing the new cat home. I searched everywhere,

and couldn't find her. It was like she'd teleported out of the house somehow.

I hit on the solution in the end. I picked up CoNN and carried him round the house, waving him at corners of each room. He didn't like it, but I knew when he started to hiss and growl that I was in the right area.

I found the new cat, thanks to CoNN's grumpiness, in the kitchen, where she'd managed to crawl into a really small gap between the fridge and the cooker. She was huddled up next to the warm part of the back of the fridge, and I expect she was sound asleep before CoNN's hissing woke her up. I'd have never found her in a month of Sundays if not for the CoNN detector.

I coaxed her out with some more salmon, while CoNN got normal cat food. Most unfair, I know, especially after using him in such a shameless and undignified manner.

Thankfully, as it was Saturday, I could stay home all day and make sure their initial antagonism didn't come to blows. Their staring match from yesterday in the bedroom was now continuing in the kitchen. The new cat was sitting by the gap to the back of the fridge, and CoNN was sitting right in the middle of the doorway, as if to say 'you aren't getting into the rest of the house without getting by me first.'

I was tempted to lock them both in a small box and leave them in there till they made friends, but no, I realised that that would actually end up being lock them in a small box till one of them was dead.

I left them to it again. I knew interfering wouldn't work, they just needed to get used to each other.

So instead I watched NASA launch their *Solar Probe Plus* probe. It's possibly the worst name for a space vehicle since the Astrobotic *Coca Cola Lunar Orbiter*, which to be fair was a whole lot worse.

The *Solar Probe Plus*, which I'm just going to call the *SPP* because it sounds less silly to me, is designed to fly close to the Sun and take measurements of the magnetic field and solar wind. Some of the technology is quite cool though, figuratively and literally. Because it's going to be so close to the Sun, it has a funky new carbon heat shield that protects the instruments from damage, and behind the heat shield everything is kept cool with a liquid helium coolant.

It seems odd to me, I mean, I understand why, but you always

think of space as being really cold, and traditionally it is. But when you get close to the Sun, and it heats everything up, then you have to actually cool things down while in space.

Not long after the launch, I heard some growling coming from the direction of the cats, and quickly stuck my head into the kitchen, where CoNN had the new cat backed into a corner and was looking like he was spoiling for a fight. I walked over and tapped him lightly on the shoulder, and he jumped about a metre into the air. He'd been so intent on his prey, he hadn't noticed me come in.

The new cat scarpered as soon as she had a gap, and ran under the bed. CoNN batted at me with his claws, and then chased the new cat under the bed, where hissing, yowling, and shrieking started.

Great, just what I needed.

It went quiet, and I peeked under the bed, ready to jump back if my eye was attacked. I only have the one left, I don't want to lose it to an irate cat. They were back staring at each other. There didn't seem to be any blood from the fight, so I left them to it again.

Sunday, January 14th to Saturday, January 20th 2018

Sunday morning, I woke up to find the two cats curled up together at the end of the bed. I looked at them. They snoozed away. I shook my head. Twelve hours ago they were ready to kill each other, and now they're using each other as pillows.

Maybe this would work out after all.

I was a bit nervous to leave them by themselves on Monday morning. Their truce had held over Sunday, a few hisses here and there, but on the whole, they seemed much better. I just didn't want to come home and find they'd killed each other, or one had killed, and maybe eaten, the other.

I left them though, as I had to, and headed into work. Thankfully, I had a story to do early on, and so that kept me busy and stopped me

worrying.

Sudan lifts movement restrictions

Since the Mecca bomb, much of eastern Sudan has been off limits, due to fears of radioactive contamination brought across the Red Sea by the prevailing winds.

In the last week, specialist teams from the UK have been assisting the Sudanese government in assessing which areas are safe for residents to return to.

The final report has confirmed that the majority of the evacuated area is now reasonably free of contamination, and that only trace amounts of radioactive fallout remain.

An exclusion zone of 40km around Port Sudan will remain in effect for the foreseeable future, but the remaining area, a massive 250,000 square kilometres, an area approximately the same size as the UK, can now be returned to by the hundreds of thousands of residents displaced over a year ago.

A government spokesperson from Khartoum announced that “the government will provide assistance to all displaced people to return home, and the army will be on hand to help with rebuilding work to repair damage to homes and villages caused by a year of neglect.”

Refugees in the Onbada refugee camp almost immediately began to gather up their belongings, keen to return home and resume their lives, which had been put so suddenly into limbo by the mandatory evacuation.

With Port Sudan still out of bounds, the Sudanese economy will continue to suffer from the lack of its biggest seaport, causing yet more hardship to an already poor nation.

The contamination from the Mecca bomb was really the last thing Sudan needed. I mean, sure, Saudi Arabia got it far worse, but they're a very rich nation and aren't likely to collapse over it. Sudan on the other hand, is so poor that this has hurt them badly. Losing their main port, and losing a good chunk of their country for over a year has battered at what little economy they had, and a huge portion of their revenue has gone into keeping the refugee camps running. They're going to end up needing a lot of international assistance over the coming years after this, I reckon.

Anyway, the day ended, and I headed home, with absolutely no idea what to expect. Thankfully the answer was that both cats were there, alive, and uninjured. CoNN came to the door to say hi when I got in. The new cat didn't, but she also didn't run away when I walked into the lounge room and found her on the sofa.

I don't know if they'd spent the day hating each other, but indications were that they seemed to be getting on now they'd had a couple of days to get used to each other.

Next morning, on the train into work, I got a real shock. I was sitting in my seat and the woman to the left of me reached up to grab a handrail when the train hit a bump, and I instinctively flinched. I'd seen a shape of it in my left eye. The sparks had made sense of a movement. I jumped up and woohoo'd, which made people on the train look at me funny, especially the poor woman sitting next to me, who looked most startled, but that's OK because they give me funny looks all the time anyway because of my burns, and I was getting off at the next stop anyway, so who cares what they think.

I waved my finger in front of the electronic eye, but we were back to just sparks again. Maybe it was just a one off bit of random luck, the sparks happened to show in just the right kind of way and there was no real improvement at all. But it gave me real hope, I was convinced I was finally on the road to 3D recovery.

I was in an awesome mood when I got into work, I was telling everyone about it, and they were all pleased for me.

My mood stayed up all day, even though there was bad news from Argentina. The trial of the oil workers and sailors was over.

Argentina trial verdict for British oil workers

Buenos Aires, Argentina. The trial of nine British citizens illegally seized from Falkland Islands waters ended today, with verdicts announced for all nine defendants.

The six oil workers were jailed for five years each for attempted theft of Argentinian state property, namely the oil within Falkland Islands territory. The three sailors on the ferry carrying the oil workers were all found guilty of conspiracy to assist the theft of Argentinian state property, and jailed for a year each.

A protest was immediately raised by the Foreign Office through the Swiss ambassador in Argentina, and the Argentinian ambassador was once again summoned to the Foreign Office, and once again ignored the summons.

The human rights group Amnesty International have declared that the nine British men are political prisoners, and have called for their immediate release, saying that while it is not their intention to judge the right and wrong of sovereignty of the islands, holding citizens of the UK for breach of a disputed territory clearly defines them as political prisoners.

Since the arrest of the nine men, Argentina has again attempted to seize more people in illegal acts of piracy, but was prevented by HMS *Astute*, a Royal Navy submarine which is stationed in the area.

Since the incident with HMS *Astute*, the Argentinian navy has remained outside of the Falkland Islands' territorial waters.

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So, the Argentinians have locked away some of our people and yet, I'm still in a good mood because I managed to see a waving arm. I wonder if that makes me selfish.

That evening, I got home and found my new gym membership

card had arrived in the post. I decided that the best use of it would be Monday mornings, so I start the week on a rush of adrenaline and other natural exercise related chemicals, in the hopes it would start me off in the right frame of mind and improve my week. I'll find out next week if it works or not.

I've never even set foot inside a gym before, and I don't know what I'll do when I get there, what facilities they have, anything. I've seen them on TV, all full of machines, with instructors telling people to run faster, jump higher, stuff like that. I can do without being yelled at by a gym instructor, I'm going there to get out of the house, not to win the Olympics.

Thursday at work, I was writing about - you know, I can't off the top of my head remember what it was I was writing, it was something, not very exciting, trying desperately to fill my quota, and someone spotted it was snowing.

For the first minute or two everyone was excited, snow does that to everyone I think, and then people started to wonder about getting home, and if the trains would still be running after more than half a millimetre of snow.

I decided to head home early, just in case it kept on coming down. By the time I got to the train station it was really getting heavy, but thankfully the trains were still running, and so I made it home with no real problem.

The cats were still tolerating each other when I got home. I'd been quite impressed that I hadn't heard a hiss in several days. There was a smell somewhere though, and it really didn't take me long to find it. CoNN's beanbag had been peed on, I don't know if it was the new cat or CoNN that did it, but it was a vile smell. I banged my head against the wall a couple of times. Last thing I needed was for them to start marking territory. I caught them one at a time, and carried them over to the beanbag and rubbed their noses in it, telling them NO in a stern voice. It's all I can do, I can't yell at them, they wouldn't understand why. Let's just hope some negative reinforcement will cause whichever one of them it is to stop it.

I washing-machined the beanbag, which involved removing all the beans first. I got most of them into the bin liner, but getting them back

into the beanbag after washing was a bit trickier and I lost quiet a few. Thanks to the wonders of static electricity, the new cat got a whole bunch of them on her fur, and thought it was great fun. I expect I'll be finding beans for the next year in various parts of the house.

I worked from home on Friday. The snow was still coming down thickly, and hadn't taken the night off for a break. Neither cat peed on anything all day while I was there, which was a bonus. I got my last article for the week done, all about a shortage of police in Oxfordshire. Not that there isn't a shortage of police throughout the whole country, even London has a shortage, but that doesn't mean I can't write about it and advocate an increase in numbers in Oxford.

Saturday I woke up late. It was Saturday, I was allowed to. I got up, staggered my way to the kitchen, and realised I was getting some depth perception. The sparks in my left eye were still sparks, but as I stood in front of the fridge, about to open it, I could see a vague outline of a fridge in my left eye, among all the sparks. There were more white sparks where the white fridge was, and less where the darker colour wall was behind it.

I scared both cats off by jumping around happily. I called my parents, who were really happy for me, and I closed my right eye as I talked to them and I could just about make out a person shaped silhouette on my pad. It was awesome. I tell you, until you've lost an eye, you don't realise what you have. The last 18 months with no depth perception have been tough as anything, missing grabbing for things, spilling things, I stuck my drinking straw up my nose once, and had to spend the rest of the night drinking snot-flavoured drinks.

It was really fuzzy, full of sparks, but it was 3D, and it was enough to start with.

Sunday, January 21st to Saturday, January 27th 2018

I spent most of Sunday just *seeing* things. I tried watching some TV with my right eye closed, and it didn't work out too well. I could make out the outline of the TV, and occasional things on the screen,

but not enough to watch a show. I think it had worked with my pad screen on the phone to my parents the day before simply because they stayed still and my brain got used to the shape.

I tried locating the cats using only my left eye, and ended up almost standing on one of them. I don't actually know which one, all I know is I heard a noise as one of them bolted as my foot came down. I decided at that point to not risk the lives of the cats, or myself, and to just let it happen naturally.

The snow was still coming down, I reckon there was a good 40cm on the flat, and much higher in drifts, by the time I went to bed on Sunday night. Monday morning, and it had added another 10cm, but was at least starting to slacken off a little.

I took my first trip to the gym. I'd picked a gym - the gym, there isn't really a lot of choice, in Didcot instead of in Oxford. Good job really because no trains were running at all.

So, I got to the gym at about 7am, hideously early for a Monday morning, but I intended to at least start my plan to do this regularly, instead of simply collapsing at the first hurdle of getting out of bed in time.

I was given a guided tour of the facilities, which were fairly impressive, but I can't compare it to others as it's the only gym I've ever been into. It could be the worlds best gym, or it could be a piddling little thing for all I know. As this is Didcot, I suspect it tends towards the smaller side, but it seemed to have enough stuff. There were about 30 bits of exercise equipment, treadmills, bikes, rowing machines, weightlifting, other things I wasn't too sure what they were. They all had control panels that looked like they not only controlled their machine, but could also be used to fly the starship Enterprise. I admit it was a bit intimidating for a first time gym user, and no staff were around to help out once I'd had my five minute intro tour, and so I did the one thing I knew I could do and had no problem with the controls of. I went and used the pool and did some swimming.

Of course, the downside of that is that if I wanted to also be sociable there, swimming isn't the best thing. Everyone has their head in the water, concentrating on either beating their time or on simply

not drowning. I'd anticipated using treadmills and bikes and setting up a conversation with some nice friendly local women who felt like passing the time of day, but ended up speaking not a single word to another person as we all just swam.

So, good in terms of I felt quite awake and ready for the week come 9am Monday, which is highly unlike me, but a fail in the being sociable stakes.

Better than nothing, I guess.

Of course, I was working from home again due to the snow. I was working on my first article when I realised I hadn't covered my sparky eye over with the eye patch, as I usually have to use the pad for any serious work. The sparks were still there, but much fewer, and I could clearly make out the shape of the pad, and even the fact that there were lines of text on the screen. There was no way I could read the text, but there were definite lines. I looked at the window and could make out the curtains, the wall, the half way divide between the top and bottom window, it was all starting to come together. At last!

With this, and with my appointment for hair regeneration therapy in March, soon I'll be almost a normal person again. Except for the burns, and the lack of lips of course, they aren't normal, but I'll definitely be a whole lot closer.

Come the end of the day, and the snow had finally stopped. A snow plough had come along the street and helpfully buried everyone's cars, so that their cars could use the road. Snow ploughs are a device of irony they really are. No gritters, not for small streets like the one I live on. Not having a car I didn't have the problem of being blocked in. Gerald and Simon however *did* have a car, and so I helped them with some shovelling on Tuesday morning so they could get it back. Gerald was still out of work, but Simon had to get his car out so he could get to his practice on the other side of Didcot.

The cats watched me out of the window in fascination, I guess they'd never seen someone shovelling snow before. Actually I bet NewCat had never even seen snow before at all, she's so young. When I got back in, I was covered in snow, which they didn't enjoy as it was cold and wet and not at all as much fun as it looks out of the

window. The cats hadn't been allowed out since NewCat came home, as you're supposed to keep a newcomer inside the house so they get used to their new home for a while.

I realised, I'd given the new cat her name. It was a rubbish name, but I'd been calling her new cat for weeks, and so, without intending it, she was NewCat. I certainly didn't think it would end up being her name, but it seemed to have stuck since she came home.

I tell you, if they could speak English, I'd be hunted down and killed by the both of them. Cat of No Name and NewCat. Great. I'm a journalist, I'm supposed to have oodles of creativity and imagination. And that's what my cats end up being called. I worry about myself sometimes.

Anyway, Tuesday, though the snow was over, it was still stopping the trains from running. I did the usual working from home call in the morning so we could all decide our daily targets for articles. I was assigned to do the annual article about the still ongoing dispute about the winter fuel allowance between power companies, the government and the EU, with the elderly caught in the middle. No problem, as I'd done the story before, so I knew the angle to take, I just had to be careful not to repeat myself, or I'd get my head bitten off by Andrew, my editor.

It's surprising how rarely it's been a problem, us both being called Andrew.

Anyway, I took a bit of time off in the morning to finally login to that online dating site I'd joined last year. First time I'd logged in since that day, so it's been a good waste of money so far.

I'd received one message, a hello, from someone local, but the message was from several months ago, and her account was now listed as 'no longer available', so I'm guessing I was a tad too late on that one. I didn't peruse the profile, no real point, I just deleted the message and moved on. I did a search for local women and only got four results. Awesome. I extended the search to be within 20km, which seemed reasonable, and there were a couple of hundred. That would be something to start with.

I spent the next hour trying to narrow down the search to people

with compatible interests, non-smokers, no kids, that kind of thing, and kept narrowing it too much, and ending up with zero matches. In the end, I finally got a search that I was happy with, and with a half dozen people on it.

I'm not shallow, but, I'd already restricted by personality and likes/dislikes first, so yes, I picked the two that I thought were the most attractive of the group and dropped them a hello message. I don't see it's wrong to judge people by their looks if you've already based a lot of your opinion on personality already. If you disagree, that's fine, we all have different rules for this kind of thing. I have mine, you have yours. You can be as wrong as you like.

I wasn't expecting an immediate reply, so I logged out, and actually started to work on my article.

I always keep my feeds open from the news wires as I work, just in case I spot something that's way more interesting than the article I'm working on at the time. I just caught a glance out of the corner of my eye, a report from the Reuters feed, about activity in an Argentinian military base.

I tapped on the summary, and got the entire Reuters report. One of their reporters had been interviewing some locals by one of their military bases, and they'd been told that hundreds of soldiers had shipped out that morning. I did a quick search of the other wires, and found that AP was reporting the same at another base in another part of the country.

I dpushed out an urgent meeting request to my local group, and got Editor Andrew - I'm going to call him that from now on, so as to differentiate him from myself - and a few of other writers on the line right away. We had a chat about it, and we all agreed, it was something of interest, but we needed to be careful what we published in case we were wrong. We all picked a scenario and worked on it. I picked the scenario I thought most likely, a big Argentinian training exercise on a mockup of a Falklands landing site, Dawn did the scenario of the Argentinian army actually setting off for the Falklands to invade, Steve did one where they were off on an unrelated military exercise, and Miranda did one where they were massing in a forward base, possibly in preparation for a Falklands invasion, but hadn't set out yet.

Editor Andrew was going to have a chat with George, the boss, and see what he said while we got on with the articles.

As it turns out my article was completely wrong, I won't bother to reproduce it here. Miranda was almost spot on, and hers was the one that ended in print once we'd got the details from the news wires.

AP reported in first that they had information showing that the Argentinians had massed several thousand soldiers at the Port Belgrano Naval Base. I had to laugh at that, after we sank the Belgrano in the last Falklands war, why on Earth would they keep that name? It *has* to be considered bad luck for them.

We altered Miranda's piece, putting in the appropriate numbers and places, and ran it. We hadn't beaten everyone to the punch, but we were certainly among the first few to break the story. I don't *know* that we beat the Foreign Office to the news, I'd like to think we didn't, and that they didn't get their foreign intelligence from The Sun, but they didn't release a statement until later in the day, when quite a number of papers and websites had already reported on the troop movements.

The Foreign Office announced that they believed the troop movements to be nothing more than typical internal organisational activity, and were unconcerned for the safety of the Falklands based on the latest intelligence.

I expect they wouldn't have said anything even if they were concerned, and they certainly wouldn't have said 'yeah, we know they're planning something and here's what we're doing to stop them'. Cos, I expect that the Argentinians also check the foreign offices announcements feed. Just in case.

Wednesday there was a little good news at least. Not brilliant, but better.

Lights back on in Seoul

Over three months since the EMP weapon that devastated South Korean infrastructure, and led to the recent conflict between North and South, the first street lights have come back on in the heavily

damaged South Korean capital, Seoul.

A Dutch team has been responsible for replacing tens of thousands of bulbs in the lights, while a British team has been repairing links between the city and the closest power station, which has been repaired by French engineers.

A truly international effort is helping to bring South Korea out of the darkness, but the scale of the task is daunting. Simply repairing power stations and reconnecting cities to the power supplies is only the first stage. Millions of houses, even if connected back to the grid, will still be without power. Estimates are that four in every five houses in Seoul have damage to their internal wiring caused by the EMP, meaning tens of thousands of buildings in the capital alone will need to be repaired by electricians before they can even address the fact that most of their electronic devices will need to be replaced.

It is a common misconception that if an electronic device is switched off, it will suffer no damage from an EMP weapon. The unfortunate fact though, is that this is only true on the outskirts of the affected area. Closer to the centre, the energy from the pulse is high enough to cause an electrical overload even in items that are turned off and unplugged.

With South Korea no longer able to produce its own electronics for the time being, and their economy having effectively collapsed, it could be some time before the country can once again become the high tech giant it once was.

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I didn't mention the ongoing disease crisis, the food crisis, or the law and order breakdown, all I was focused on was the electricity. I could write a hundred articles about what's broken down over there, and not run out of material.

On Thursday, I managed to read my first word with my digital eye. I had to hold the pad up to my face so I could read it, and I admit

the font was larger than I'd usually use, but it worked. I can see very few flashes any more, so my guess is that the eye is working just about as well as it ever will do. Even from a distance, my fake eye is helping my real eye with reading. I couldn't use it to read with from a distance by itself, but I think it just adds a few extra hints to the shape of letters, and lets me read just that little bit more easily.

I checked back on the online dating site that evening, and was a bit disheartened. I'd messaged two people, and got one 'thanks but no thanks' reply, which was definitely a form message, there was even a button at the bottom of the mail tool on the website to send that message. The other hadn't bothered to reply, so, either she hadn't logged in, or she hadn't even been courteous enough to tell me where to stick it.

Or where not to stick it, if you see what I mean.

I spent another hour or so doing another search, choosing new keywords, all that fun stuff, till I got another reasonable sized list. This time with ten people on it. I just mailed them all. Why not, you don't get anywhere by being hesitant, it seems.

Sunday, January 28th to Saturday, February 3rd 2018

Ugh, so, Sunday, I became the snotmonster from outer space. It'd been coming for a few days, I just didn't want to admit it. I don't like being ill, and I always get paranoid these days that I'll end up back in hospital, even though it's been, what, nine months or something since they last let me out. Well, not counting the eye fitting, but for actually being ill, that is.

Thankfully the cold didn't last too long. Monday the trains were running again, not because of any melting of the snow, just because they'd cleared the track with some magic snow clearing train. Not sure why it had taken them a week, but maybe England only has one train snow plough, it's not like we have snow every year or anything.

Oh wait, wait a minute, yes we do.

Even though I could have, I didn't go into work on Monday anyway, I decided it would be rude to spread my germs around the office. Although some may consider it selfish of me not to share, I decided to be nice and keep them all to myself.

I worked from home on Tuesday too. I felt well enough to work, but not really desperate to be in the office. The news on Tuesday was all about the Argentinian ambassador. He'd been expelled from the UK for repeatedly ignoring requests to attend meetings at the Foreign Office. I can't say I'm surprised. You can't have an ambassador act like that.

The Foreign Office announced that the Argentinians were welcome to send a new ambassador, but apparently the Argentinians had declined to do so. Great, so that means we've effectively got no direct diplomatic contact any more. Then again, seeing as he's been ignoring us for months, we haven't had direct diplomatic contact since then anyway, so no change there.

Aaaaand another step towards all kinds of crap breaking out.

Wednesday I decided to go back into the office. I got there and wondered why I'd bothered, as about half the company was off sick. I guess the bug had managed to infect just about all of us. Those that were still in the office were either newly recovered like me, or seemed to just be coming down with it.

Thankfully it was finally starting to warm up, and so it wasn't quite so horrible when I went out that morning to interview people on the streets about their impressions of 2018 so far, for an article I was working on.

In fact, why not. Here's my pre-edited draft of the article for you. I wasn't going to include it, but it's an easy read article, so I might as well. Not everything I put in here has to be earth-shattering.

How is 2018 for you?

If you're young and have free time, chances are you've been having fun with the snow. The sledging has been excellent all round the Oxford area, and snowmen and snowball fights have been an everyday occurrence.

If you're a bit older, you've probably been yelling at the younger kids for throwing snowballs at you, and you might have been having the odd flirting snowball fight with your favourite boy or girl.

If you're a young adult, you may be worrying a bit about this month's credit card bill, as most people in your age bracket have admitted to spending more than they could afford for Christmas. Last year the average person took until April to pay for their Christmas presents.

If you're what they class as middle aged, chances are you've spent a lot of January helping out other people. Oxford seems to be awash with people who have been helping at homeless shelters, donating money to the poor, and trying to brighten up the lives of others. Well done middle aged adults, you're an inspiration for the rest of 2018.

If you're old and not so well off, the year so far has been cold. It's been bitterly cold, and the high prices of fuel and the lack of help from the government means a chilly house and mugs of hot soup and tea to keep warm. If you're lucky you've had help from family and friends. If not, it's been a horrible year so far.

If you do know someone who is old, and who needs some help, spend a few minutes of your time, because one day, you'll be there, and you'll wish others would do the same.

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Yeah, it was kindof also about the winter fuel allowance, I know I've already covered that this year, but the earlier story was all about the political side, this was trying to get people to identify with it themselves, and to take personal action. I don't know if it'll help one iota, but it's my job to try and affect change for the better.

Well OK it's my job to write articles that will sell newspapers, but

I *want* to affect social change at the same time. They aren't mutually exclusive goals.

The rest of the week was nice and quiet. I remembered on Friday to check that online matchmaking website, and almost fell off my chair when I had a positive response. I also had two no thanks' and seven ignored me, but a non-rejecting message was a bit of good news.

OK so her response was just a 'hi there, nice to meet you' kind of thing, so I guess I now have to make small talk for a bit. I'm rubbish at small talk, I really am. I did my best though, and sent back a few lines about me and then asked some questions. Just the sort of 'second sentence after meeting someone' kind of thing.

Sunday, February 4th to Saturday, February 10th 2018

The weekend I napped. Frequently. I didn't go out, I didn't see anyone, I didn't even check the news much. I played with the cats a bit, though they seemed perfectly happy with each other's company. I think that that's a good sign that it was the right decision to adopt NewCat. I often find them both curled up together, or play fighting, and I rarely hear a hiss. It happens of course, they're cats, they'll disagree and hiss, but they seem to like each other. I still can't work out if either of them is dominant, I get the impression they've signed a truce to decide that at a later date.

Monday, I checked my online dating account again, and had had a reply over the weekend. I sent a reply of carefully measured equal chattiness back, and headed off to the Gym for the morning. Good to feel that it's all natural and spontaneous conversation. Or not.

I knew I wouldn't bother with the equipment so I just went straight to the pool and did a few lengths. I noticed I was the slowest person in the pool, which didn't surprise me, as I've been swimming precisely once before this week, and that was two weeks ago. OK, I mean recently, I learned to swim in school, but I've barely swum anywhere since, except maybe in the sea a few times on holiday.

Into work on Monday, and finally, some news I was excited about. A group called the B612 Foundation, which is a name to inspire conspiracy theorists into hysterics, launched a private asteroid hunting space telescope into orbit.

It was the first launch I'd seen from the Sea Launch company, which launches rockets from a converted oil rig. This is so they can launch from right on the equator, so it's cheaper and can send up heavier loads than the same rocket could when launched from the traditional launch facilities, which are all quite some way away from the equator.

The launch went well, and it was good to see. Not quite as cool as the submarine based launch I saw last year, but it came a close second.

The telescope itself, called Sentinel, will go into orbit between the Earth and Venus sometime in the next six months, and will begin to hunt for asteroids and comets that could possibly impact the Earth at a later date.

I've never been a big one to believe in the conspiracies about asteroid impacts, but you know, it can't hurt to have another telescope out there doing some extra checking. Just in case. I mean, at some point, something somewhere has our name on it. It's happened before and it'll happen again, so I have no objection to just being careful and keeping an eye out for it coming knocking.

Wednesday the last of the snow had finally melted, which meant that the train company had no more excuses for the continually late trains I'd had to put up with since the snow came. It didn't stop them, they were still late, but what can you do? It isn't like complaining helps.

When I got into the office, there was good news from South Korea at last. They'd announced that all of the power plants that they could salvage were now back online, and that over half of their cities were now back on the power grid. It didn't mean much, the power plants were mostly exporting electricity, as the usage from South Korea was still virtually zero. Some street lights, power for the pumping of gas for heating, water grids, and a couple of rich people who'd managed to hire private electricians to rewire their houses, and that was about

the entire demand for power across the country.

On the other hand, South Korea exporting electricity may be the only thing that will save them. They're earning a small fortune doing it, and that's all the income they are getting, and they need it to be able to afford new infrastructure work, and to pay their army, which stops the North Koreans from having another go at them.

It's such a mess down there. All from one small bomb. Just like, I guess, the USA is a mess, all because of one small bomb in Mecca. Crazy.

Friday I finally decided I'd had enough of CoNN and NewCat sniping at each other, and opened the cat flap for them at the bottom of the stairs. CoNN was out of the door before I'd finished standing up from unlocking it. NewCat just ignored it. Maybe she doesn't understand cat flaps. Well, she'll learn, she can see CoNN using it, or she'll be an indoor cat, it's her choice.

CoNN was gone for a while, and came back in looking very pleased with himself. Either he'd caught a bird or a mouse, or he'd found himself a female cat, either way, he was purring up a storm.

Sunday, February 11th to Saturday, February 17th 2018

End of the weekend and I still hadn't seen NewCat go out at all. Though to be fair she could have gone out for several hours and come back in and I'd have never noticed. I was too busy reading the latest reports on the Argentinian military that were coming in. Apparently the base they'd started to mass at was now absolutely jam-packed full of soldiers, so if they were going to do anything, it would be soon. I kept my fingers crossed that they wouldn't. I may get easy work out of writing war stories, but I don't want to have to do it.

Monday, and back at work after the gym there was excellent news. The Argentinians had apparently dispersed back to their bases around the country. I breathed a big sigh of relief, as I bet every politician in the country did. Not to mention the entirety of the British military. They may be professional soldiers, and the best in the world,

but a battle avoided is always a win. The Foreign Secretary made a speech on TV about how pleased he was that the Argentinian military had withdrawn back to barracks, and he hoped it was a sign of future cooperation, although he did mention that the continued violation of Falklands airspace by the government sponsored “flight of patriots” needed to stop.

Back on this side of the world, and on Tuesday, conversation on the online dating site had moved as far as a suggestion of coffee on Saturday, which was accepted. I still didn’t know that much about her, I knew her name was Francine Burbridge, and she liked cats and sci-fi TV shows, which I pretty much knew already cos it was part of the search parameters that I used to come up with her profile.

I didn’t really know how I felt about it all to be honest. Parts of me felt guilty, as if I was doing something behind Taima’s back. Obviously not the case, but I guess, I’d spent so long with her, that it was a natural thought in the back of my mind. Part of me didn’t really care what this Francine person thought of me, and yet other parts of me desperately wanted some acceptance, some validation that even looking the way I do, I’m still a worthwhile human being.

I kindof fidgeted the rest of my way through the week. I didn’t want to be nervous, but I still was, sometimes more than others. I did an article on a bunch of kids who’d had to be fished out of the Thames just south of Oxford after they’d been messing around and pushing at each other by the river’s edge, and had all ended in the water. Two of them were taken to hospital, and the rest were taken back to their parents. I’d gone to speak to the parents on Thursday, and I was pretty boggled at how much one of them didn’t seem to give a damn that their child had just almost died. The others seemed to care, but that one, wow, either a bad parent, or, no, really, just a bad parent. Actually no, they could have been *really* worried, but hadn’t wanted to talk to the press, that’s the other alternative, I guess. It didn’t feel that way though. His whole attitude seemed to be that his kid was an annoyance he’d rather be rid of.

Anyway, Friday evening I decided I didn’t feel like microwaving yet another TV dinner, so I took myself round to the Chinese

restaurant in town. I don't like eating out by myself, but that was my only option, what with Simon and Gerald turning into hermits recently. I wouldn't mind but they won't even let me pay for the evening out, which I can easily afford to do, so I have to eat alone. It gets quite depressing.

Anyway, I got to the Chinese, and sat down, and was about half way through the starter when all hell broke loose. There was a guy dressed as a dog suddenly prancing round the restaurant, there were firecrackers, indoor fireworks, and cymbals. The other customers were all clapping and having a great time, where I was sitting there with a big load of 'say what now?' all over my face.

One of the other customers must have noticed me looking confused, and at least a little disgruntled at all this going on while I was trying to eat and ignore the rest of the world, and she enlightened me that it was the Chinese New Year.

Of course, I'd had no idea, and the last thing I wanted to do is be surrounded by cheering and banging as I wanted to eat. I know it sounds like I'm a grumpy git to say something like that, but, when I sit down to eat, I want to eat. If I'd wanted to be entertained too, I'd have gone to the cinema and had a hot dog for dinner as I watched a film. I'd just wanted a quiet night.

I think I offended the waiter when I asked for my main course to be put in a takeaway box so I could go home with it. He gave me a very dirty look as if I was passing judgement on six thousand years of Chinese history. I honestly wasn't and if I'd come out to see the festivities, I'd have been delighted, but I just wanted to get home to the peace and quiet.

I got my takeaway, and I left them a decent tip, which seemed to mollify the guy. I didn't want to piss them all off, I go there on a moderately regular basis. I don't mention it in my diary much cos it's not that exciting usually, just like I don't mention my bathroom breaks or brushing my teeth, it's just something that happens. Last thing I wanted to do would be to annoy them, and then find a dead rat in my food next time. Or worse, to *not* find the dead rat that they'd prepared for me.

Saturday came, and why the hell was I so nervous? It was crazy, I'd exchanged maybe five messages with this person, and we were

going to have some coffee, nothing more, I wasn't about to propose, and I didn't really care, logically, if we got on or not. I guess, though, like everyone, I was craving acceptance, and I was scared my horrible face was going to blow it for me.

I went into Oxford, and found the coffee shop. It was a Costa, so nice and generic, nothing fancy. I sat there facing the door, for two reasons. Firstly so I could spot her coming in and wave where I was, and secondly, so she could see me and pretend to be there to meet someone else if my face repulsed her too much.

Yeah, I thought about it that much, I went into that much detail in my planning in my head. Good job really, as I think that that's probably what happened. I waited till an hour after the appointed time, and nobody showed. I felt, not gutted, that's too strong a word, annoyed I'd wasted my time, stressed in case she'd seen my face and had done a runner before I'd spotted her, I don't know, a complex mix of emotions, none of them positive though.

I gave up waiting and went home. It'd been a crappy end to the week, I have to say.

Sunday, February 18th to Saturday, February 24th 2018

I did spend Sunday feeling a bit morose, I admit. Stupid that I placed a good amount of self esteem on the acceptance of a complete stranger. I had to give myself a good shake to snap myself out of it.

At the gym on Monday morning, the week didn't start well. I was distracted and swam into someone. They got a bit abusive, and no matter how much I apologised, it was only going one way, so I swam off, and quit my session early. I don't do fights, especially with people who make it their business to be fit and strong. I'd lose a fight with a 70 year old man probably, I certainly wouldn't stand a chance against someone that looked way too big and beefy for my liking, and obviously with a bad case of testosterone poisoning to boot.

So, I went into work early and feeling grumpy, and wrote a couple of articles that were sent back to me for complete rewrites. Obviously

because of my mood, but that put my mood down even more, and so it was a vicious cycle.

I snapped out of it Wednesday in the end, when the cats decided to gang up on me to cheer me up. CoNN brought me his old remote controlled mouse to play with, and NewCat just sat on me and purred until I cheered up a bit.

Whoever says cats just use humans for food hasn't ever had cats. Sure some of them are loners and hate people, but some of them are really connected with their humans, and do care, in their cattish way.

It was a good job, because Thursday I needed to have my wits about me for the breaking news from the South Atlantic.

The day was normal, as any other day is normal when you spend your time looking for the abnormal to report the news about. But normal for me. I'd been watching the wires, checking emails, thinking about writing an article about how the Siberian Tiger seemed to be on the verge of extinction in the wild, with only six breeding pairs known to be still alive after poachers had devastated the remaining population in the last decade.

At about 11am, we got a glass stream address from an urgent tagged Reuters news feed article, about another Argentinian boat interception under way in the Falklands. We all jumped onto the address and we could see it was a sailor working on a small boat. It had to be one of the sailors, rather than an oil worker or something, as he was manning the controls of the boat, so was probably the boat's captain. He looked to be a he rather than a she by the size and hairiness of the hands.

From the stream we could see a naval ship catching them quickly. The video resolution wasn't good enough to see the flag, but from the whole tension among the people on the boat, we knew it was Argentinian.

The question was, would the Royal Navy be there to save the day again? Maybe the Argentinians were taking the chance because they knew our submarine was somewhere else. Maybe they were just feeling lucky.

The Argentinian boat pulled alongside, and we could see they were waving to the captain of the transport boat to stop. He didn't,

and so the Argentinians trained their ship's gun on them. Under that duress, the captain slowed the transport to a stop.

We could see the worried looks on peoples faces. The oil workers knew that if they were taken back to Argentina they were set for a long jail sentence, and the sailors not much better.

A couple of hundred metres beyond the Argentinians, we all cheered when the conning tower of a submarine emerged from the ocean. The navy was here, and now was the time for the Argentinians to run for home.

I don't know much about submarines, but someone else in the office said it was one of the *Astute* class subs, the most modern submarine in the navy, and one of the most advanced in the world.

We didn't expect the Argentinians to fire on it.

We all saw the gun on the Argentinian ship swing round to face the sub, and we lost sight for a few seconds as the captain of the transport boat looked to the controls as he fired the engines back up and ran for it.

He flinched, what I expect was to the sound of the Argentinian ship firing, and he looked back, and we could see the submarine on fire. Its tower had received a direct hit, and there were flames everywhere. Everyone on the transport was watching, and then the Argentinian vessel just seemed to erupt from the middle, and break in two. It was gone within a minute. We watched, but there were no survivors in the water. The *Astute* class submarines were designed to have weapons that could sink an aircraft carrier, a small patrol boat didn't stand a chance.

We stared at our screens pretty much mesmerised, as it all happened as we watched. The transport boat changed course and headed for the submarine, and we could see people on there were grabbing for fire extinguishers to help with the fire. As they came alongside, we could all see that the navy had it in hand, the fire was still burning, but it was coming under control.

One of the navy sailors waved off the transport boat, and it turned back to look for Argentinian survivors. There were none, just oil and wreckage floating on the water.

You could have heard a pin drop in the office. We all almost

jumped out of our skins when the office doors banged open, and George was there. 'Get writing, get something out there right now,' he shouted at us all, and the spell was broken and we all jumped to work.

My article was the one that was selected after our standard quick-write session. I won't put it here, it just pretty much describes the same as I've already said above. It went up onto the website, and we carried on refining it as more news came in.

A while later, the MOD confirmed that the submarine in question was HMS *Astute*, which had been on patrol duty around the Falklands, which included shadowing the transport boats to and from the oil rig. The damage to the submarine was apparently significant, but there had been no casualties. The tower that had been hit was the location of things like the air purification system, and nobody works there on a regular basis. I'd thought it would be the control room, but apparently on a modern submarine that's buried in the middle of the ship, so it's protected.

The MOD announced that they regretted the loss of life aboard the ARA *Baradero*, the ship that was lost, but defended the right of HMS *Astute* to defend herself when fired upon.

Twitter was alive with rumours. Supposed specialists were saying that the *Astute* would never be able to dive with a big hole, especially as its air purification systems had been destroyed. It would have to remain on the surface and return to the UK for repairs. There was speculation that the Argentinians may try and sink the *Astute* while it was vulnerable, sending planes with torpedoes to finish the job.

It was all kicking off. It was the last thing we wanted, but the Argentinians had fired the first shot. Let's just hope that there will only be two shots fired in this conflict.

On Friday, the world news was all about Israel, but here in the UK that hardly even made the news.

The Israeli news was that one of their air force bases had sustained serious damage when Palestinian militants had attacked it using dozens of medium range rockets. The Israeli Iron Dome defence system, which is designed to shoot down missiles with missiles, was completely overwhelmed, with far more inbound rockets than it could

possibly shoot down at one time.

While casualties had been only light, the Israeli air force had lost a number of aircraft. Coincidentally ones that in the preceding weeks had attacked the Palestinian Gaza Strip, where the rockets had come from.

While I always say let's avoid violence, an attack directly onto the aircraft that are attacking your people is vastly preferable to suicide bombers killing civilians, and the cost of replacing the planes may give Israel pause to think before they attack Palestinian civilian targets again.

But anyway, nobody in the UK really gave a rat's arse about all that. I mention it because it needed mentioning for completeness. The story here was the Argentinian response.

The Argentinian president, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, came on TV mid afternoon UK time, so probably around lunchtime in Argentina. She was obviously pissed. As in angry, not drunk. Well maybe drunk, you can never tell with her.

Despite the fact we'd all seen the Argentinian navy fire first, she accused the Royal Navy of launching an attack during a lawful arrest of thieves, and of firing the first shot. She said that the *ARA Baradero* was defending itself when it fired at *HMS Astute*, and that the Royal Navy were the aggressors in the action.

We all watched with pretty much dangling jaws. We all wondered if she knew she was lying. Surely her advisers had seen the video stream. Maybe she didn't see it herself, and so she thinks she's telling the truth, it's impossible to tell.

She went on for a bit longer, quite a bit longer actually. She seemed to be rambling a bit to be quite honest, which is why I didn't rule out drunk. She didn't make any threats, just accusations. She didn't threaten retaliation, thankfully, which would have been really bad. Even though it was full of accusations and arm waving, I think it may have actually done the job of defusing the situation. Of all the things she could have said, she didn't say any of the really bad ones.

The week finished on a high note by not being at war. I'm not sure how much of a positive that can be counted as, but it's better than I'd expected at the end of Thursday.

It's a good job too, I have next week off work, and I would've felt

like a complete twonk to miss things if they'd become more serious.

Sunday, February 25th to Saturday, March 3rd 2018

Lazy Sundays are always better when they're lazy knowing that Monday will be a day off too. I hereby declare lazy weeks off to be the best thing since sliced bread.

To be quite honest, lazy weeks off by yourself get a bit boring. I watched the news on Monday as the euthanasia law was passed by a narrow margin in parliament. It was quite a long and boring parliamentary session for such an important issue. There were no impassioned speeches, no outraged rebuttals, just number crunching and comparative information delivered in dry monotones.

The new law requires that anyone who chooses to kill themselves with medical assistance, must undergo a psychological evaluation, and must agree to the procedure in the presence of their GP, a lawyer, and a government official from an assisted suicide monitoring group that will be set up.

It sounds OK, and should prevent people being pressured into it. They get locked away with those three people one at a time, and if they don't convince each one of them that they genuinely want it, then the request gets denied, even if only one of them has doubts.

It seems strange to me that anyone would even consider it, but hey, I'm only 26. Maybe when I'm 100, or whatever age I live to, I'll sing, or croak, a different tune. Even with my face like this and being bald as a rather bumpy egg, I wouldn't even consider it.

Tuesday I went into London, mostly just for something to do. There's a place near Leicester Square that does some awesome chilli dogs. I hadn't had one since I left uni, and I loved them then, and I've discovered I still do now. They're so unhealthy, but you know what, I don't care. Chances are, some cancer or mutation from that nuke will kill me in the next 10 years anyway, so why worry about a heart attack in forty years time? OK, I'm being melodramatic, but you see my point.

I did some random shopping on Oxford Street while I was in London. The place seems much quieter than it did a few years ago. There are more coffee shops and restaurants and less actual shops. Except clothes shops, there are still lots of those. There was nothing selling films or music, and the only places selling technology were a couple of phone shops, but most people buy those online these days too.

That was a bit disappointing to be honest. I had no idea that somewhere as major as Oxford Street would be affected by the move to online shopping too, I'd thought there'd always be good shops there.

Wednesday I was a bit conflicted. I want Reaction Engines to win the race against the US scramjet, but on the other hand, I never like to see space tech go horribly wrong.

It wasn't televised. As it's a US Air Force thing, I'm not surprised, but the news on the BBC was that the latest scramjet test had had a catastrophic failure. It had exploded on separation from the plane carrying it, and the explosion had destroyed both the test engine and the plane, with the three crew on board all killed.

I hate being conflicted. I cheer because the US plans get set back after they tried to play dirty by spannering our engine, but then, is it nationalistic and even racist to think that way? Shouldn't we all cheer as anyone makes a step forwards, regardless of who it is? And as for the three people killed trying to advance science for all humanity, then that's definitely sad. On the other hand, the USAF isn't primarily designing it for space flight, they want it to work for missiles to kill people with. ARGH, too many conflicts, head hurting!

Right, I'll move on from that, before I spend three hours ranting into my pad, and end up with 200 pages of drivel.

Friday there were more reports from US drone flights that there had been another massacre in North Korea. The town of Songnim, south of the capital, was the site of this latest example of North Korean politics for the people. It'd be really nice if China would do something about them. They exert tons of influence in North Korea, but they do nothing. I suppose they don't really care, they just want North Korea to be a buffer zone between China and South Korea, so

that the South Koreans, and therefore the States, don't have a border with China.

I hope the Chinese do something about this soon though. I mean, what's more important, a land buffer between them and the States, or millions of people being persecuted and kept in effective serfdom, killed in their thousands to perpetuate a corrupt, psychopathic regime?

Oh right, yeah, the land buffer is more important. Sorry China, I forgot. Carry on.

Saturday, I suspect in response to the attack on HMS *Astute*, the Foreign Office released a statement, calling for an end to the continuing overflights of the Falklands that happen on a daily basis from Argentina. This was a step up in the stakes though, and I quote: 'While obviously, we cannot and will not shoot down a passenger plane full of civilians, no matter how repeatedly their government breaches our airspace, we will end the matter decisively if the flights do not stop within seven days, by destroying the runway they take off from. This will allow us to have the minimum level of casualties, while protecting our airspace, as we are more than entitled to do under international law.'

This really now puts the screws on the Argentinians. They're forced to back down, or they're forced to risk our attacking their airfield. And they have an ultimatum, seven days.

Heads up people, I suspect next week, this is all getting real.

Sunday, March 4th to Saturday, March 10th 2018

Sunday

I'm going to be doing daily entries this week. I just think that if it's all going to kick off if they don't stop the overflights, then it would be best for the diary if I'm not doing the whole thing retrospectively. I find that sometimes it's hard to write my diary in the 'I don't know what's going to happen' frame of mind when I already