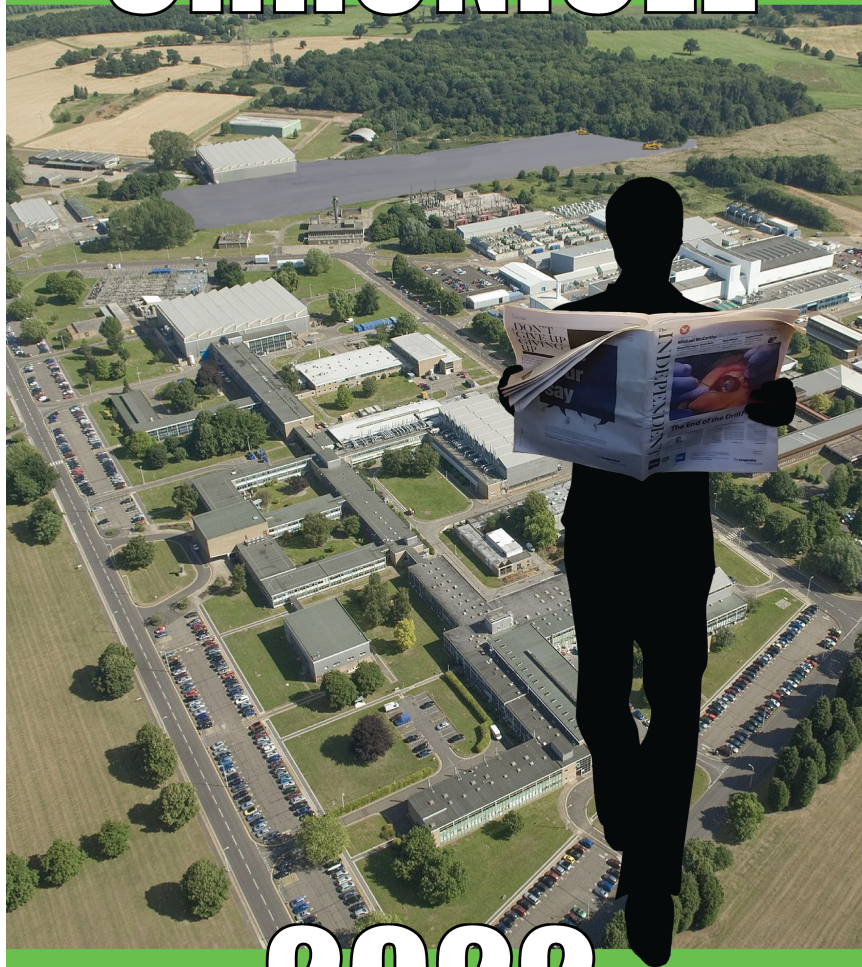


CHRONICLE



2022

Andrew Woodmaker

**A whole new journey begins,
but for millions, the journey ends.**

In this ninth year's worth of entries from a diary stored on a futuristic recording device found after a house fire, Andrew Woodmaker gets a closer involvement with the British space program than he could ever have dreamed of.

In 2022, tensions rise further in the Middle East, with Israel and Iran glaring at each other over the threat of nuclear weapons, while Saudi Arabia's civil war continues to rage.

Andrew Woodmaker receives an unexpected opportunity, but one which comes at a price. Should he stay with what he knows, or give it all up on the possibility of a dream coming true?

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.

CHRONICLE 2022

by

ANDREW WOODMAKER

Edited from recording device by

Michael Simms

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Dedicated to Bob and Dustin

Who always backed me in my last life.

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.

Saturday, January 1st to Saturday, January 8th 2022

Welcome back to another exciting year of my life. I have no idea whatsoever what the year will have in store for me, so if some of you who're reading could just nip to the end, have a quick read, and then come back to January and let me know if I should get out of bed this year, or just sleep till 2023, that would be great, thanks :-)

I've set myself a New Year's resolution, and this year I'll tell you what it is in advance. Mostly because I forgot the one last year and I feel a bit silly over that.

This year, my plan is to finish the year happy in my work, however I manage that. Either I'll work out how to make things better for me at the Independent, or I'll find myself a new job, or I'll find some way to make my website start making some real money. One way or another though, that's my goal for the year.

So far, the year's started off pretty well. Evie and I went to the London fireworks, which this year were set off from a number of barges on the Thames, as well as some on Big Ben. It's a shame they didn't fit out the new London Skyway terminal. Probably cos it's still being built, and you don't want to mess around with half-built buildings like that.

Thankfully it wasn't especially cold while we were there, and there were people all round selling hot food, so we munched our way through a fair amount of that to keep warm. We still needed our coats and gloves, but we didn't need Arctic survival gear and a St. Bernard.

New Year's day was a Saturday, and Evie and I spent the day at Simon and Gerald's house, as they were having a New Year barbecue. It was only moderately insane doing it at this time of year, as we did the cooking and eating in their conservatory, not outside, which would have led to hypothermia all round.

Nobody else was there, Amanda and Hayden had been invited, but they had their own plans, and some of Simon and Gerald's other friends had also planned to show up, but just never arrived. That meant extra food for us, and a more relaxed time for me, without strangers there making me feel a bit uncomfortable.

The day ended with an announcement from over in the States that made us all very happy. Well, except for Simon, who didn't care less, but my pad flashed up an alert onto my lenstop that made me quite literally squeal.

Warner Brothers had announced they'd signed a deal to produce films of the new Albus Potter books!

This was when we discovered Simon isn't a fan. When the rest of us woohoo'd at the announcement, he just watched and then patted Gerald on the head. I couldn't believe it, I'd known Simon for all these years and I didn't know he was one of those rare, possibly insane, people that don't like the Potter books.

I took Gerald to one side and loudly asked him if he was sure about this Simon chap, if he doesn't like Potter, maybe Gerald needed to find himself someone else.

Gerald loudly agreed with me, and Simon oi'd us both, until we couldn't keep a straight face any more. We pity Simon for his lack of taste, but we unanimously decided to not hold it against him.

I spent the day on Sunday by myself. Evie and I had decided between us to have our own quiet days in our houses. That's how it is with introverted people who're still getting to know each other. It takes energy and effort, and we need a bit of a break to recharge our batteries once in a while. Doesn't mean there's a problem, it means we just need to sit down in our own space and relax every now and then.

It was nice to spend the day paying attention to the cats, and I think they appreciated the playing and the stroking. Well, CoNN enjoyed the playing but he wasn't putting up with the stroking. Apparently Evie is the only one allowed to do that these days.

Traitor cat.

Monday being a bank holiday was a special bonus, no need to go into work for the soporific meeting of pointlessness. The evening was a bit different, as Evie introduced me to a couple of *her* friends, Abby Whitehouse and, let me see if I get this right, Miroslav Sladek, who's from Slovakia. They're a couple who are friends from Evie's previous job, the one before she was at the power station, and they wanted to

check me out, apparently, make sure I was good enough for Evie.

It was fair enough, it's what good friends do. I'd been a bit suspicious about Hayden with Amanda, but I'd not wanted to poke my nose in, and after a while when it seemed she was happy and he was treating her right, I stopped worrying.

We all went out to an Italian restaurant and then to see *Middle Earth: Forming again*. If I'd been the one to choose, I'd have picked something else, but Evie was keen to see it again, and her friends hadn't seen it yet, so it was three to one, and I didn't mind enough to try and veto it.

It actually made a bit more sense this time. Thanks to Evie explaining some of the Tolkien mythology, and remembering the film from last time I saw it, I really did get more out of it. I still can't say I *enjoyed* it, but I didn't hate it this time.

Abby and Miroslav seemed nice enough, although I had a real hard time with Miroslav's accent. Completely nothing against him over that, accents are accents, you can't judge people by them, but it was a bit awkward when I kept having to ask him to repeat himself. The other three seemed to think I'd developed a hearing impediment or something, but as they'd all known each other for years, Abby and Evie had had plenty of time to become accustomed to the way he talked, and it was my first night.

At one point I even surreptitiously switched on my lenstop translation app in a desperate attempt to gain clarity, but unfortunately the thing won't translate English to English.

On Tuesday, I had to finally accept it was time to go back to work. I know it had only been three days off, but it felt longer. To start the week off, I went over to Northleach, a small town, possibly even only a large village, on the Oxfordshire Gloucestershire border.

The article was pretty sad, there had been a fire at a rescue home for dogs, and loads of them had died. It was really quite horrible to be honest. The fire had happened on the Monday, and the owners, who'd invested their whole lives into animal rescue, were in no fit state to talk. I talked to some of the employees, but they were all almost as distraught about it as the owners, and so it wasn't easy or fun to get a workable article out of it.

Thursday I covered the completion of the Oxford sleeping pod building, which was right in the town centre. Even in affluent Oxford, on the first night over a dozen people showed up hoping to use it. As it had capacity for 36 people, that wasn't a problem for them to cope with.

The whole thing is designed so that, as long as there's physical room in the building, they'll always have available pods. If more people start showing up, and the place starts getting close to capacity, the staff running it can just requisition more pods, and they take no special skills to install, they literally slot on top of each other, a 30 second installation job. Of course, there are only room for about 60 pods in the building before they hit the ceiling, at which point, expansion becomes an issue, so let's just hope there aren't that many people in need.

The week wound down without much else of interest. I got an email on Friday from work asking if I had any more articles waiting to come in, as the paper was running low that day, but I had nothing. They'd rejected my sleeping pod article the day before, so I wasn't desperate to go and spend my Friday evening hunting for new news for them. If they were that desperate, they could just print that one.

Sunday, January 9th to Saturday, January 15th 2022

The weekend was quiet, just spent lazing about with Evie. It's lucky she's as happy as I am to do very little, just to wind down after a busy week at work. I have to admit, I'm probably not the most exciting person in the world, but I'm glad she accepts me for who I am. Maybe she thinks the same, or maybe she's chomping at the bit to go out and be busy and doing things, but she hasn't said anything.

Monday was a disaster of a day. I went to London for the meeting, as per usual. It was a waste of time, as per usual. Afterwards, I went to fill up the car for the trip home, and discovered I had no money.

I tried to pay for my petrol at the garage, and the pump just rejected my card again and again. I thought it may be a problem with

the pump's payment machine, so I went into the garage shop to pay. They told me my card was declined, and asked if I had another one.

Of course, I didn't, I've never had credit cards, and my bank debit card had always been enough for me.

I called the bank, and they said my account was empty.

That was obviously not the case, as last time I checked my balance, I'd had almost £6,000 in there. Not to mention that my money from my wages plus the sponsorship money for the balloon flight had gone in since then.

The bank asked me if I'd purchased a car in Manchester last week, and I told them that no, I most definitely hadn't. I already have a car, and I've not been to Manchester in years. Actually, I've never been to Manchester at all.

The bank guy told me, quite unsympathetically, that if I wished to dispute the charge, I'd need to fill in a form on their website, and someone would get back to me within 28 days.

I told them in no uncertain terms that 28 days just wasn't good enough, I wanted *my* money back, and I needed it to pay for petrol in the next 28 *minutes* not days.

He said the best thing he could do was offer me a temporary overdraft facility until my claim was investigated. He offered me a £500 facility, which wouldn't even cover my rent, but I didn't have much choice, I needed it then and there, or I'd have some explaining to do at the garage.

It took an hour for the overdraft to be approved. The guy in the garage seemed to be quite understanding, he'd had his bank account emptied a couple of years ago, and it had been a nightmare to sort it all out.

After about an hour, I tried again, and this time, my card didn't come up declined on the machine, it came up cancelled.

I called up the bank again, and they confirmed that the new overdraft was organised and on the account, and that my debit card had been stopped as it was the source of the fraud.

I almost - no, not almost, I did yell down the phone at them. They *knew* I was trying to pay for something, I'd told the last person, and so how the hell was I going to pay now they'd stopped my card?

I said some quite rude things and the man on the other end of the phone hung up on me.

I couldn't believe it, they lose my money, they screw up my ability to access my money, and then they think it's unreasonable that I get upset at them. I was incandescent with rage at that point. I quite literally wanted to go find the nearest branch of my bank and burn it down. I'm not talking figuratively here, I really wanted to kill them with fire right then and there.

The guy in the petrol station took it all in his stride. I guess it was obvious to him that I wasn't just trying to take him for a ride, and so in the end he gave me a form to fill in, asked for some proof of ID, and then let me go on my way, with two weeks to come back and pay the balance.

His being nice took the edge off of my rage. I guess it was mostly embarrassment at being put in that position by not one but two bank screw ups. On the way home, I filled in an application form to get an account at a different bank, because really, I was done with this one.

That evening, I told Evie what had happened, and she bailed me out, with some of my own money that I'd paid to her for the website build last year. I thought it was ironic, and again embarrassing. She told me not to worry about it, she was fairly sure she could trust me by now.

That wasn't the point though, it was the whole issue of having to ask people for help when I shouldn't need to. I can't remember when I last had such a combination of anger, embarrassment, and abject humiliation.

I stayed at home on Tuesday, I didn't feel like going out on the streets and talking to people, and so I wrote an article about green energy in the Orkney Islands.

Orkney Islands now energy independent

For the last three years, the Orkney Islands have been installing a series of tidal energy generators to extract energy from the ocean currents. Initial trials of five turbines proved to be very successful, and so an expansion of the project was approved in 2020.

This week, 20 new turbines were switched on, giving a grand total of

25 power generating units. These provide up to 47.5MW of power, which is enough to power all of the homes and businesses on the islands, with a sufficient excess that it is expected that the islands will be able to export up to 8MW of power back to the Scottish mainland.

Orkney has long had high levels of green energy, with a record 50MW of wind power being fed into the Scottish grid on one windy day back in 2016. Wind power is much less predictable than tidal power, and this new energy source will mean that Orkney's wind farms are surplus to the needs of the island, and can export all of their energy to Scotland.

MP for Orkney and Shetland, Erin Clark, has announced plans to increase the number of tidal generators for both Orkney and Shetland, as "the water resources available to the islands will bring jobs and revenue to the local communities, and provide new sources of employment for the islands."

Orkney has one of the strongest tides in British waters, and it is expected that the scope for exploitation for this resource could provide hundreds of times as much electricity generation capacity.

Environmental activists have raised concerns about the potential harm that could befall local sea life if they become caught in the currents of tidal energy turbines, but these concerns have been deemed to be less important than the potential benefits from the project.

*

I spent most of the rest of the week on the phone to the bank, getting effectively nowhere, and watching the news feeds. I just couldn't shake my bad mood from the bank fuck up, and so I wasn't in the mood to do much else.

I've decided to take next week off. I haven't had a week off for ages, just a few scattered days around Tiltmas. I'm going to just try and veg out and calm down a bit. It's just a mistake, they'll fix it. I've got my new card and Evie lent me a grand, so I have some money. I

just need to get over it, it won't be a problem once they've sorted it.

Thankfully Evie's been great, she's been really on my side, which I needed. She's let me rant a lot, and wave my arms around and hasn't told me I'm being stupid even once, which is nice.

Sunday, January 16th to Saturday, January 22th 2022

It's been a big relief having no work stress this week. I've done precisely bugger all that was stressful all week.

I probably should have just carried on with work. I'm going to run out of holiday days if I use them all so quickly, but, that's a risk I'll just have to take I guess.

I spent some time with Evie, making some small changes to my website. That's another big advantage with having her for a girlfriend, she doesn't charge me for website changes any more. I won't take advantage, but she doesn't mind doing small changes that just take her a few minutes.

I bought myself a new game with the money Evie lent to me, which I probably shouldn't have done, but I needed to take my mind off things. I bought the Assassin's Creed anthology, all six games including the new one they just released last week. I'd never played any of them before, so it was a good buy, as it wasn't that much more expensive than just buying the sixth one by itself.

I hadn't realised they were all set in the present. I thought it was all historical, not a person from now looking back into the past. That was actually quite a big surprise.

I think playing Assassin's Creed all week is largely responsible for my feeling a lot better now. I got rid of all my aggression and anger at the bank by running round and beating things up in ancient cities.

I've only just got to the end of the second one now, so I have plenty more to do. Not too bad for £80.

I did get up on Tuesday morning to see that Evie had got up early

and was playing the game herself. She gave me a look as if to remind me she's a computer geek, of *course* she likes games too. Unfortunately for her, she's been working all week, so hasn't got as much completed on the game as I have.

I actually managed to get an article done this week too for my website. I wrote about the Spanish water main that's transferring water from the wet north to the parched south.

Giant Spanish water pipe complete

For the last four years, Spain has been building a massive pipeline to provide water from the north of the country, where water is plentiful, especially in the mountainous regions, to the southern regions, where desertification has been taking its toll on farmers and residents alike.

The water main, which can provide up to 40km³ of water per year, has been criticised by residents of northern Spain, who fear it will cause their region to suffer water shortages, for the benefit of the south of the country.

Since the Catalan independence referendum was ignored by the central Spanish government in 2016, tension has been high in the north eastern province, which is one of the two sources of water being tapped for the pipeline. Separatists have threatened to blow up the pipe if it starts to cause shortages for local communities. Due to threats during construction of the pipeline through the province, high levels of security were needed to prevent sabotage attempts.

Farmers in the south of Spain have welcomed the pipeline, as it has become increasingly difficult in recent years to produce food in the drying conditions of the region.

Conditions in the south of Spain started to deteriorate after local communities began to dig illegal wells, after the government raised taxes on water to encourage responsible water use. The end result was the complete exhaustion of the local aquifers, leading to the worst European drought in living memory.

Critics of the project have suggested a better and cheaper solution would be to build a number of desalination plants along the Mediterranean coast.

Government planners rejected that proposal on the basis of ongoing costs and long lead times to build the plants.

*

Friday was a nice day, I woke up at about 9am, and found Evie was still asleep. I shook her awake, and told her she was late for work, and jumped out of bed to make her a quick breakfast while she got ready.

Before I could take two steps, she grabbed me and pulled me back into bed, and told me not to worry. She'd taken the day off of work so we could have an extra day together, and she'd wanted to surprise me.

Of course, she needed tickling for that, and, well, you can guess the rest.

Sunday, January 23rd to Saturday, January 29th 2022

After spending every night at my place last week, Evie was stuck at home on Saturday and Sunday doing consulting work from her office. It'd been nice to have her around, and I think she'd enjoyed it too. Originally I think she was staying around because she was a bit worried about me, but as I mellowed out over the week, she was just here because she was enjoying the company.

The house was quiet without her, and so I tried to liven things up a bit with the use of catnip.

No, not for me. I don't get off on catnip, sorry.

I sprayed it on some of the cats' toys to entice them to play with them. NewCat was ecstatic, and went crazy with them for about half an hour, before flopping down exhausted. CoNN didn't seem to care, which was unusual for him, he's always liked a bit of catnip, but he

was content to lie on his beanbag and watch.

On Monday I was back at work, and on the way in, I stopped off at the garage to pay for the petrol I'd not been able to pay for at the last meeting. Just in time, it was two weeks ago, and I'd only had two weeks to pay it. The guy at the garage said he'd started to worry I wasn't going to show up. I told him I'd had a week off of work and this was my first time going past the garage since.

Once I made it into work, the weekly meeting was mostly its usual crappy self, except that they set me up with a meeting with the North American correspondent, Cynthia Enriquez, who was going to be attending a press conference from Intel. The conference was expected to be all about the thought controlled computer they'd supplied for Stephen Hawking a few years ago. That computer had been custom made for Professor Hawking, but the rumour was that the new version would be much more useful in general medicine, although nobody really quite knew how yet.

Just after lunch I called her from my car as I was on the way home. She was a bit surprised I was calling while driving, but I explained it was a self drive car, and so it wasn't a problem.

We talked about the technology, and what questions the science department would like to have asked. I said it was a bit difficult to know what to ask when we didn't really know what the new technology development was. She agreed, and suggested she could set up a private lenstop stream so I could send any questions that I was interested in asking directly to her ear as she watched.

I thought that that'd be a good idea, and an hour later, when the press conference started, I was there, attached to the side of her head, figuratively.

The conference turned out to be something that could be a complete turning point for many locked in people. The technology, according to Intel, had been refined so that anyone could use it, not just the one person that it was designed for.

The whole problem with brain monitoring, is that it's always been hard to detect the difference between two similar thoughts. Existing systems can easily tell the difference on just about anyone with the two traditional brain monitoring activities of thinking about playing

tennis or walking around their house. These two activities always trigger activity in different parts of the brain that are easy to distinguish, but they aren't instinctive, and it isn't easy to control a computer in that way.

More instinctive is simply thinking up, down, left, right, which is easy to do for the human, but much harder to read for a computer, as the thoughts are so similar. That's why previous versions needed to be custom made for Stephen Hawking, and the other people lucky enough to have one.

The new technology used a neural net, which would monitor brain activity and learn what the patient's brain does when the patient thought of up, down, left, right. These subtle changes in brain chemistry would then be interpreted by the computer into a communication system, so locked in people could communicate once again.

It was a really big announcement. So far a few dozen people had been fitted with brain monitoring devices like Stephen Hawking's, but each device cost hundreds of thousands of pounds, as they each needed to be tailored to the individual. This would bring the price down to a level affordable by most hospitals.

There were a couple of questions I wanted to ask, that I passed on to Cynthia. The only one she got a chance to ask was about how long it would take for the neural net to learn enough about the patient's brain activity to be useful. The answer we got was a bit ambiguous, as on some people it could be minutes, on some it could be weeks or months, or sometimes never.

Another big advantage for this new technology, is that as it's completely non-invasive, it won't need to go through years of clinical trials before being accepted. It just needs the patient's hair to be shaved, and a monitoring cap placed on the top of their head. The computer will do the rest. No insertions, no injections, just the sensor cap.

I made a few calls later that afternoon to the NHS, asking them their plans for the new devices. They told me they had no plans yet, and their use would be subject to regulation just like any other medicine.

In other words, the bureaucracy needs to be allowed to waste a

couple of million making the decision.

The article went out that evening, and we got a fair amount of feedback from readers. Most people were saying that NICE, who'd make the final decision to use the new brain scanners or not, needed to make their minds up quickly. Now the technology is available, every day we leave people locked in when we don't need to is borderline criminal.

I definitely agree with that opinion. With it being completely non-invasive, they need to just buy the things as soon as possible, and get them onto people who need them. Really, it's the only humane thing to do.

The other big news this week was the arrival of *BepiColombo* at Mercury.

Mercury probe fails at end of journey

The Mercury probe *BepiColombo*, which was launched by the ESA in 2015, has failed to reach a stable orbit around Mercury, according to ESA scientists.

After a journey lasting six and a half years, the craft, with its main ion propulsion drive having worked flawlessly for all that time, suffered a malfunction in its secondary thrusters shortly after it entered orbit around the innermost planet in the Solar System.

When it attempted to orient itself towards the planet, so it could begin taking readings, one of the attitude thrusters locked on, sending the satellite into an uncontrollable spin. As all of the thrusters on *BepiColombo* are fed from the same fuel tank, once the failed thruster ran out of fuel and stopped firing, there was no way to regain attitude control. This left the probe, which cost 1.2bn Euros, spinning uncontrollably around Mercury.

A press release from the ESA has confirmed that there is no possible way to make use of the satellite now, as even though its spin would allow it to face Mercury several times a second, there was no way to

obtain a stable communications lock with the craft to order it to send its data back to Earth. Even if such a communications lock were possible, the data from a spinning satellite would be close to useless.

*

It was a really sad end to the mission. I've been keeping track of it since its launch, watched it as it did two flybys of Venus, and four of Mercury, before settling into what was supposed to be this new stable orbit.

Still, we can't get them right all of the time. If we did, there wouldn't be any amazement when we *do* get it right, it would just be another 'yeah yeah, another success'.

Of course, when it's our turn with the Europa rover, I'll be a lot less relaxed if we balls it up.

Friday was a huge relief to me, as I got paid. Finally. First pay since my bank account was emptied. I wasn't quite into my overdraft, after the money Evie had lent me, but I was close. It's a big weight off my mind getting some new money in there. I think I'm going to have to have a couple of frugal months though, as my wages don't cover my regular monthly outgoings. It hadn't been a problem before, the big buffer zone I'd had with my savings had really stopped me from worrying, but with that now gone until the bank decides to give it back, I need to be careful.

Sunday, January 30th to Saturday, February 5th 2022

On Sunday I wrote a new article for my website. I didn't really understand a lot of it at the time, but Evie was telling me it would be huge.

Bitcoin virus wipes out value of internet currency

Over the last 24 hours, a new virus has infected the internet in a two

pronged attack on the Bitcoin currency, an internet based cryptocurrency that was founded in 2009.

The new virus, whose origins are unknown, has infected computers all across the world, deleting Bitcoin wallets and leaving millions of users out of pocket.

At the same time, the virus has infected most, or possibly all, major Bitcoin exchanges on the internet, and modified their cryptographic systems, leading to all undeleted Bitcoins being usable multiple times, thus reducing the trust in accepting them in exchange for goods or services.

Until yesterday, when the virus began to attack, Bitcoin valuations were estimated to total around £2.8bn. Since the virus attacked, the valuation has slumped to less than 10% of its previous level, and all across the internet, companies are removing Bitcoin as a payment option, for fear of accepting a coin which has been compromised by an infected exchange.

Bitcoin exchanges have called for calm, and assured users that the cryptographic divergence is solvable, and they expect normal service to resume within a matter of hours, but estimates show that up to a quarter of all Bitcoins have been deleted in the past few hours, and the virus is continuing to spread and cause more damage.

*

Within an hour of posting the article online, it had been bought by over a dozen newspapers, including a statewide exclusive sale to the a newspaper in California for £100, and a whole slew of non-exclusives in the UK.

I couldn't believe it, the one story that was being huge was one I barely understood. I had to ask Evie to explain what she'd told me to write, and she spent the next few hours going over Bitcoin and how it worked and what the virus was doing.

I still don't completely understand it, but I trust her, and obviously she was right, it's big news in some areas.

I took us out for dinner with the new money I'd made from the sale, £275 in total. It was the Chinese New Year on Tuesday, and so I booked us a table at, what is in my opinion, the top Chinese restaurant in Oxford. It was a big event, and they actually had what I thought was a real tiger in the middle of the restaurant. Thankfully not, it turned out to just be a volumetric display of one. It looked so real though, and you could walk round it, and see it from all angles. It was the first time I'd ever seen a volumetric display up close, and it was really impressive.

The food was good there, although I think I wouldn't have minded what it tasted like, I was so intrigued by the tiger. Evie ended up kicking me under the table, and reminding me she was still there. She acknowledged that the tiger was impressive, but she pointed out that she was more impressive, and that she'd keep on stamping on my foot till I recognised that fact.

It was a fair comment, and so I restricted my tiger ogling to when she nipped off to the loo for half an hour. OK, more like five minutes, but still, it was a long time.

The rest of the week was just full of news. It's been one of the busiest weeks I can remember for a long time.

On Wednesday, the government announced they were allocating £5bn to sending teams around the world to search for new sources of antibiotics.

In recent years, we've been running lower and lower on antibiotics that can affect some of the more adaptive bacteria, and despite the ban on using them in animal feed in the UK, other countries continue to waste what little antibacterial lead we have over the bugs.

There have been rumours from around the world of some bacteria becoming completely immune to all of the antibiotics that we have, although I don't recall any of these rumours being confirmed.

Possible new sources of antibiotics are being found regularly. I saw on the BBC a few years ago that just one cave in New Mexico was found to have over 20 new antibiotic varieties, but these were quickly patented and locked away in the vaults of US pharmaceutical companies, so they could protect sales of their remaining antibiotics without the expense of developing new ones.

The new initiative will involve sending teams into caves, jungles, and oceans, all of which may have plentiful sources of new antibiotics. I just hope they can find and develop them before the ones we have all stop working. If that happens, welcome to the new world where a bad toothache, or stepping on a rusty nail, can be fatal.

Thursday was the big day for space science. I had to put my article into the Independent, which sucked, but then, just about everyone was covering it themselves anyway, so it wouldn't have made me any money on my website.

ExoMars confirms methane outgas origins

For the last year, the combined Russian and European *ExoMars* rover has been examining a vent on the surface of Mars, which had been observed to be venting quantities of methane into the planetary atmosphere.

It had been hoped, but only by the most optimistic of scientists, that a methane outgas would indicate life on Mars.

While life was the unlikely result, it is known that in the past Mars used to contain conditions that were suitable for life as we know it. It is believed that it is more than possible, in areas below the two metre ionisation level of the solar radiation on the surface, that some life may have survived, in the way that extremophile life survives here on Earth.

The more likely cause was that the gas vent was the result of a geological movement, causing trapped gasses to escape to the surface. While not as scientifically exciting as new life, it would still have been a great discovery, leading to new science describing the Martian interior, and formulating patterns for the very core of the planet.

Due to the failure of the recent InSight lander in 2016, this would have given Mars geologists some of the information they'd hoped for from that probe. However this was also not the cause of the methane.

The cause, according to ESA scientists, is a small to medium sized meteorite which struck the surface of the planet several million years ago. The meteor was small enough to not leave a permanent crater, and all evidence of its actual impact was eroded long ago by the Martian winds.

The only remaining surface feature was the crack at the point of impact, which since then has been venting methane, which is known to be produced by the irradiation of carbon compounds, common on meteorites.

ExoMars has identified that the meteorite lies at a depth of four metres, and the escaping gas is the reason that the impact point has remained somewhat unburied for millions of years.

While the result is a disappointment to scientists, who had hoped for new science to investigate, the result finally lays to rest the mystery of the methane outgas, and has been hailed as a major success for the *ExoMars* mission.

There are many places on Mars where methane is found venting to the surface. It is unknown if the same explanation can be given for each of them, or if other methane plumes may be of different origins.

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I was really disappointed, I have to say. I didn't really expect alien life, but I'd definitely hoped for it. Maybe we'll find life somewhere else on Mars. The sooner we get a manned mission up there, the sooner we can start really exploring, instead of all this farting around with robots of only limited capability.

On Friday the news started to wind down after a busy week. The only thing of note was that Bitcoins became effectively worthless. Exchanges had been closing left right and centre, and their owners, who were often anonymous, disappeared into the woodwork with what was left of the money that people had invested. Only around 10% of issued Bitcoins were still undeleted, and of those, most were

compromised, and able to be used multiple times. Of course, by this point, nobody was even accepting them, and the billions of pounds they'd been worth at the start of the week had effectively dissolved into internet smoke.

Sunday, February 6th to Saturday, February 12th 2022

There was some note in the news that Sunday was technically the 70th anniversary of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, but the celebrations for the platinum jubilee aren't due to take place until the middle of summer, when it's much warmer.

The Queen made a brief TV appearance, thanking us all for being British, and other nice stuff. She's definitely looking old now. Yes, I know, she's looked old for ages, but she looks *old*. The kind of old where you're always surprised when you next see the person, and they haven't died yet.

Monday was a busy day. I had to stay in the office in London to write another sponsored article for HomeHeart, which pissed me off. I hate writing sponsored articles, just let me write real news.

The new thing I was advertising was actually not a bad system from them, their new modules allow you to phone home and switch on the oven or microwave. You can also switch on things like the TV and washing machine, but I can't see that being too useful. I can't imagine the person that fills the washing machine and then turns it on three hours later.

That afternoon, I was out at a press conference with the police in Oxford, about a suspected murder in Abingdon.

Murders in Oxfordshire aren't unheard of, there have been several since I've moved here, but this one was a bit different. Usually they're spontaneous crimes, something like a mugging gone wrong, or one half of a marriage killing the other because of who they found them in bed with. This one was different though, and interesting enough to report on.

Abingdon death believed to be murder

A women in her mid 30's was found dead in her home on the 7th of January this year, and the death was initially believed to be accidental, as the victim, Ms. Jodie Simmons, was found at the bottom of a flight of stairs in her house.

While initial evidence pointed to a fall, Oxfordshire coroner Keira Dunn confirmed that an autopsy performed on Ms. Simmons's body showed suspiciously elevated levels of arsenic in the victim's organs.

Ms. Simmons, who lived alone in her house on Appleford Drive in Abingdon, was a schoolteacher at the local Rush Common primary school.

Police are asking for neighbours, friends, and associates of the late Ms. Simmons to come forwards and identify anyone who may have had close contact with the victim, or who may have seen her between January the 5th, when she was last seen alive, and January the 7th.

Arsenic poisoning often leads to headaches and confusion, and it is suspected that the victim was deliberately placed at the top of the stairs, and allowed to fall, in an attempt to cover up the possibility of foul play with a normal seeming death.

Currently, police are investigating a number of leads, but as yet have made no arrests and have named no suspects that may be wanted for questioning.

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The police haven't given us much more than that, unfortunately. Arsenic has got to be a premeditated murder, I mean, you can't just pick up a pack of it at the supermarket, and go home and kill someone with it. It's hard to get hold of, for the very reason it's so toxic. I don't recall another premeditated murder in the region in all the time I've lived here. How exciting.

Well, OK, not so much exciting for Jodie Simmons, but still.

Maybe I can investigate it.

Maybe I can find things that the 50 police who're on the case will miss. Ummmm, OK, maybe not. Note to self. Investigative journalism on murders only works if the police have given up. That's a fairly basic rule.

Tuesday was a bit rubbish, as Evie and I had our very first argument. It wasn't as big as I'd expected it to be, but it was fairly big.

We fought about the stupidest thing, whether a pad was better than a laptop. I didn't really care, but I think something I said offended Evie's geek pride, and so we fought. Thankfully she didn't decide to bring up every transgression I've ever made, although possibly only because we haven't been together for long enough for her to amass a sizeable enough portfolio of errors to strike with.

We only fought for an hour or so, and then we had another couple of hours making up, but, it was the first. Hopefully not the first of many, hopefully we'll get to understand each other well enough that we don't fight too often.

On Wednesday and Thursday I did a double-ended article that was under both science and local, and so both of my editors were pleased. I went to West London on Wednesday, and then to Bristol on Thursday, to report on the progress of the maglev construction between the two locations.

People right by the train track were, understandably, irritated by the construction, but I was surprised how little negative feeling there was about it. People were seemingly enthusiastic because of a combination of the much higher speeds, and the much quieter trains. People living by the track told me that they were putting up with the building now, in the hopes that their lives will be made much better when all the noisy Intercity trains have all gone away.

The construction is going to plan so far, according to workmen on the track. On the Paddington end, construction hadn't progressed very far, and the line has only made it as far as Wormwood Scrubs park, although the pylons to hold the line are being built some way in advance of the line itself. That's actually not bad, around 2.5km of

track in 10 weeks. If this was regular track, that would be hideously slow, but as this is all new, and the construction companies are learning new methods, well, it's not too bad.

At the Bristol end, they've managed to get quite a bit further, as the London end has had to contend with a number of roads that go over the train line. That's meant that the track has had to be raised higher in London, taking more time. The Bristol track has made it out of the city, but they've left a gap where there's a tunnel. They'll have to raise the roof of the tunnel to accommodate the raised track of the maglev, and that'll be a time consuming job, and it's apparently still in the planning stage.

All in all, a good start, but if they don't speed up, I've calculated they'll be finished some time in 2027. I think we'd all like to see it built faster than that.

By the time the weekend came round, Evie and I were back on good terms, and we sat at my place with the cats, watching on the BBC science channel, as the Venus sample return probe went into orbit around Venus.

The probe has cameras, and so it was good to watch, but in the end it was a bit of an anticlimax. I'd been expecting them to drop the sample return probe pretty much as soon as they got to the planet, but apparently not.

The announcer told us that now the probe is in orbit, it'll remain there until July before sending its lander down to the surface. This is because of the orbital positions of the Earth and Venus, and the scientists want to have the samples from the Venusian atmosphere spend as little time in the radiation of space as possible.

It makes sense, but they could have told us in advance. OK, yes, I could have checked up in advance. Either way would have worked. I just assumed how it would work, and I should know by now after being a reporter for all this time that I shouldn't assume things.

We got bored after that, and decided to go out for the rest of the day. We ended up in the middle of nowhere, at a small pub named The White Hart, in a village called Fyfield. The food was a bit fancy for my tastes, but it was nice. I could have done without the spinach they sneaked onto my plate of fish though, that was most unwelcome.

Evie had cheeseboard dessert, and one of the cheeses was called The Stinking Bishop, and it really lived up to its name. It was chasing all the small children around the place...

Oh come on, that was funny, you didn't expect that did you!

OK, so maybe I was making that up, and it was really just a very smelly cheese. I was glad I'd stuck with the brownies, they were really quite nice and chocolatey.

Sunday, February 13th to Saturday, February 19th 2022

We had the talk on Sunday about Valentines day, and we both admitted we weren't big fans of the commercialisation of the day, and so we've agreed to permanently skip it. That's good as far as I'm concerned, I've never liked it. I just think it's cheap and tacky to show someone you care about them on one day of the year, what happened to all the other days of the year? I think people use it as an excuse to be shabby for most of the year, and make the effort once, and so it's all OK. I don't intend to be someone that acts like that.

I managed to miss the meeting on Monday, as I heard some local news that needed me to investigate right away.

I headed over to Wallingford, just a few minutes drive to the east of Didcot. It's not a big place, maybe a fifth of the size of Didcot, and we're not that big ourselves.

The news that had come in was that there was a protest going on, as local residents had discovered that one of the houses in Wallingford was being used as a legal brothel.

The irony was that the house had been being used for that purpose for years, and it only became an issue when people found out it was there. Suddenly they were concerned for the 'moral fibre of the community', which had amazingly never been harmed when they didn't know the brothel was there.

When I got there, there were about thirty people with placards and banners protesting outside a large, but otherwise unremarkable house.

There were a number of police there, but the demonstration didn't seem to be in any risk of becoming violent or rowdy.

Some of the protesters had set up cameras on tripods to take pictures of people going in or out of the building, which I expect drove their business down to zero. It may be legal, but I expect not many people would be happy for their community to know they were frequenting brothels.

I talked with some of the protesters, and then I went inside to talk to the staff, who were looking pretty harassed and upset. They claimed that most of the town knew they were there anyway, but it all kicked off when one of women in the town found her husband coming out of the building, and started a campaign against them. Nobody had objected until then, and all of a sudden, the whole town was against them.

I headed outside after talking to them, and had a chat with the police, asking them why they didn't move the people along, as they were obstructing the running of a lawful business. The police told me that as the protesters weren't actually stopping anyone going in, but people were just reluctant to be seen going in, then the protesters weren't actually breaking any laws.

That made a lot of sense. The last thing I want to see is for people's rights to protest being removed. Even though I support the business they're protesting against, what makes my views any more valuable than theirs? They should be allowed to protest, even though I think they're completely wrong. If I cared enough, I could organise a counter-protest.

Evidently I didn't care enough, as I didn't organise any such thing. Instead, I went back home and wrote up an article on the protest.

I made the article as balanced as I could, but it wasn't good enough for the editors. They'd decided the paper was taking an anti-prostitution stance, and so my article would need to be rewritten to fit in with the newspaper's agenda. I told them in that case, I'd bin it, as I wasn't prepared to compromise my beliefs and throw away a balanced article so they could print propaganda.

My local editor, who I haven't got on with for a year or so now, made a veiled insinuation that I was only a supporter of the law because I was a big user of the brothel's services, and told me that I

would rewrite it as the article was written on company time, thus belonged to the company, and as I work for the company, I'd do as I'm told.

When faced with an ultimatum like that, I did the only thing I could do. I wrote an article which conformed.

Well, kindof anyway.

I wrote it so badly that a six year old would have been ashamed of the sentence structure, and I didn't use a single piece of punctuation in the whole thing, except a full stop at the very end. I accompanied it with a note that if they didn't like my attempt, they should find someone else to write the article.

I got an ominous 'very well, we'll talk about this when you're in here next week'. I don't care though, I won't compromise my morals and do a hatchet job on a group of people just because the newspaper's policy is to demonise them. They have a crappy enough time as it is, without my adding to it.

I got a call that afternoon from the bank, who were finally contacting me about my entire account being stolen. The woman I spoke to was fairly sympathetic, and asked me loads of security questions. As it turns out, it was fairly easy to prove I wasn't in Manchester at the time my card was used, as I'd used my card in Oxford just an hour earlier. I'd bought a cup of tea from one of those snack vans which sell burgers and other unhealthy food, and paid by card.

Of course, that must have been when my card was ripped off. They must have logged my PIN number and cloned the card, and within an hour it was being used to empty my account on the other side of the country.

The bank accepted my story, and told me that the place in question was being investigated after a number of people had their details stolen after buying from that van. They said that they just needed to send me a form in the post, which I'd need to fill in, and send back to them. That would allow them to restore the funds to my account.

I thanked them and hung up. It had been a whole lot less painful

than I'd expected. I'd worried that they'd have me filling in forms and proving my identity in seventeen different ways for two months, before sending them a blood, semen, and snot sample to prove I'm not the reincarnation of Margaret Thatcher.

I guess in this instance, the system worked. I just wish it hadn't had to.

I had a nice revelation on Wednesday. I'd completely forgotten about my concerns last year about my new eyebrow and eyelashes. I'd been worried that they wouldn't behave like my right side hairs do, and I'd have to start trimming them if they just grew and grew.

I was just glancing in the mirror, something I try and do as little as possible as I don't like looking at the rest of my face, when I realised that the eyelashes and eyebrow hairs were all fully grown, and seemed to be stable at the correct lengths.

It was a bit of a relief. I'd spent a lot of money getting rid of my beard hairs, I didn't want to have to go back to shaving after all that effort. Especially not around my eye, that would have been awkward.

On Thursday, I had a bit of a bad day. It all came back to me, all the bad feelings about the Bristol tower last year.

The government had released a report on a year long investigation into the collapse, and the report had concluded that there was sufficient evidence for a trial of the managers who'd been knowingly buying the shoddy concrete. The report used the word *alleged* quite often, but I won't bother because I *know* they're guilty.

It did bring it all back to me quite badly though. All the feelings of guilt that I thought I'd got rid of a year ago came back to me.

On Friday I talked it over with Dr. Smith, and she helped me to put it into a better perspective. Now that the government had determined there was enough evidence for a trial, then I could do my bit to make sure the people responsible were put in jail. I'd spoken to them, and to the suppliers, and so my evidence would very likely be required.

I wasn't too keen on going to court, but I was very keen to see the scumbags put in jail. After my talk with Dr. Smith, I knew where my

priorities lay. If they ask me, I'll testify. They've already had all of my evidence last year when the investigation started, so all they have to do is call me. They know where I am.

That was just about it for the week. On Saturday, there was a big decommissioning ceremony on TV for the American carrier USS *Nimitz*, which had come to the end of its operational lifespan. It had been on the ocean for just a few weeks short of 50 years, which is impressive to say the least. Nowadays though, the *Nimitz* is looking old and a bit out of date compared to the new Ford class carriers that the States is bringing into service.

It does make me smile somewhat. We don't have diplomatic ties with the States right now, yet we still get TV coverage of the fate of one of its major military assets. I know it's not a big secret, you can't really hide it when you decommission something that big, but still, it amuses me.

Sunday, February 20th to Saturday, February 26th 2022

Evie was round on Sunday, keeping me from stressing too much about the meeting at work on Monday. I was fairly sure I wasn't getting fired, after all if you want to fire someone, you do it then and there, not the next week after you've given them another week's worth of wages, but still, I didn't know what they were going to say. I'll stand by my principles of not writing an article I'm morally opposed to, but I didn't know if I'd stand by it enough to lose my job over it.

I drove into work the next morning, and it was one of those long drives that seem to take longer than they actually do. You know the type, where you're getting more nervous by the minute, and the journey just seems to be taking longer than ever, just so the universe can stretch out the panic time for as long as possible.

I got into work at about the normal time, and went into the meeting, which was about as crappy as ever. I hadn't been pulled aside before the meeting, so that was a plus point, but as the meeting

was closing, I got a message on my pad to go to Alice's office.

The meeting was unpleasant, to say the least. Alice was there, as was Victoria Walton, her manager. The two usually don't get on, but they seemed to have been prepared to join forces to yell at me. I didn't realise I was so much of a threatening figure that it took two of them to ball me out.

After I sat down, they immediately started on me, just what was I thinking writing such a bad article in response to a request from my editor to write against the brothel in Wallingford? Did I think it was a joke, did I realise that this was my job and not a hobby, I do what they tell me and not what I feel like doing.

They hadn't raised their voices by this point, so I interrupted them to tell them that I wasn't going to write an article that I was morally opposed to, and if the paper was set on a stance, they have plenty of other reporters that may agree with them who could write such a nasty article.

That's when the voices went up a few decibels, and about half an octave. They asked me why I was so desperate to not give the brothel bad press, was it somewhere I liked to hang out, to which I told them that even if it was it was none of their business and if they couldn't remain professional instead of throwing around unfounded slurs, then the meeting was over.

The decibels and octaves both went right up after that. They told me that if I walked out of the meeting, I'd be fired then and there, and they wanted me to write the article the way they wanted it by the end of the day.

I point blank refused, I told them I'd never write an article I had a moral objection to, or I'd end up influencing others to believe things I find morally wrong.

Their response was to put me on a final written warning, and that if I didn't put aside my own "flawed" moral beliefs while at work, I'd be looking for a new job. They'd get someone else to do the article on this occasion, but if something came up again, and I refused to write about it, I'd be fired.

I resisted the urge to quit, and walked out of the meeting. I didn't even slam the door. I was very proud of myself.

I was on the way home when I got an email from Adrian Carsten,

who said he'd heard about my meeting with local, and he was sorry to hear things with local had gone sour. He just wanted to say that while he always wanted more volume of articles from me, he thought my writing was fine, and I shouldn't worry that I'd be hounded from the science side too.

I thought it was nice, but I wondered why he was saying it. I guessed half of it was that he *is* a nice guy, but I can't help but wonder if there's some office politics going on here, keeping me onside against local or something. I don't know, I don't follow the politics at the paper, I'm not in the office often enough to care. Maybe I'm just being paranoid, and it's unwarranted, but still, it smells a bit like politics, and I doubt there's anyone in the world who wouldn't recognise the smell of politics in the office.

It's a very distinctive smell.

Wednesday morning, as I was driving to Worcester for a story, I got a message from the bank that was most welcome. They sent me a deposit confirmation for £7,214.61, which obviously meant my balance had been restored to me.

To say relief is an understatement. I wasn't running out of money, thanks to Evie helping me out, but I'd gone close to my overdraft at the end of last month before payday. If I was close to being fired, some money in the bank would help in a big way. As it stands, seven grand, well, six after I repay Evie, would keep me alive for about four or five months, which I'd hope would be enough to find a new job.

I sent the thousand pounds back to Evie's account, and finished the drive to Worcester in a good mood.

The Worcester story wasn't the nicest, I was covering a fire in their art gallery. I'm guessing that there used to be a lot of nice stuff in there, but it's all a ruin now. The fire suppression system hadn't worked very well, and the suspicion was arson. It was a water based fire system, and if the fire, as they suspect, was petrol based, then that explains why the water extinguishers weren't very effective.

I interviewed Dr. Riley Coates, the museum curator, and he still seemed to be in shock about it all. He'd worked at the museum for

years, helping to build up its displays into a nationally important collection, and then overnight it was all gone.

They'd lost a picture by Van Gogh, on loan from the British Museum, apparently called Landscape near Montmajour with Train, which seems a bit long winded of a title to me, but Dr. Coates was so devastated about its loss that he cried when he told me about it.

I felt bad for him, but I have to say, I didn't feel a big emotion about the loss like I did for the pet shelter a few weeks ago. It's all just paintings, and I don't get much out of paintings. Maybe that makes me a soulless unrefined barbarian, but I'm sorry, that's just how I feel about it.

I did my best to make it a good article for their sake though. I may not personally get much out of it, but many do, and it was important to those people, and I have no moral imperative to tell me to force my views about it onto others.

On Thursday, the news came in that the environmental impact study from the new Northern Ireland wind farm site had been completed, and this report had given the new location a green light.

The new site, off of the ironically named Tory Island, instead of the coast of Aran Island as had been originally planned, is expected to be slightly less efficient due to prevailing winds, but should still be a significant source of wind energy, enough to power all of Northern Ireland, and export some to England and Wales.

I wrote an article on it, but the Northern Ireland department had beaten me to it, and theirs was better in some ways, more local opinion where mine was the raw science. Some of my information was folded into the article by the editor who handled it, but mostly, it was their work.

I didn't mind that too much. I don't mind being a team player, despite what some people think.

Friday I worked from home on the feeds, which in this instance meant I did bugger all. If I hadn't just had a week off in the last few weeks, I'd have booked myself another one, but I really do need to make these weeks last, I only get four of them, and I've used one already with ten months to go. That's not a good sign.

Instead, I decided to call in sick next week. I don't really care

what they think, if they believe me or not. I am sick. I'm sick to death of the attitude of local, and they've given me enough stress to want to stay home next week from a job I used to love doing.

I really hate my job.

Sunday, February 27th to Saturday, March 5th 2022

To allay suspicion that I was taking a sickie week, I wrote an article on Sunday, again on the subject of the Wallingford brothel. The locals had effectively run them out of town. They'd closed up the business and had promised to move it elsewhere. After the protesters had camped outside the building for the last couple of weeks, the brothel had had precisely one customer, who seemed to not care he was being watched going in. The women working there were now unemployed, and I expect there are now a number of frustrated men wandering round town making the night time more dangerous for the local women.

No, that's not fair, I can't say that as a fact, but I wouldn't be surprised. Then again, no, they could just go over to Oxford, or if there's one in Didcot they could come here couldn't they. Saying someone will go out attacking women just because their nearest brothel isn't quite as convenient is silly. It's a lot less illegal to just jump on a train. So I guess there will be little backlash from this, except for the women who've lost their jobs.

I made the article as neutral as possible, sticking to facts, and told them if they edited it in such a way as to make it full of anti-brothel propaganda, I'd prefer it if they took my name off of the article. I got a curt reply acknowledging my work on Sunday, no thanks, just an 'OK', and that was it.

I was glad that I wasn't working in the morning.

I sent my 'off sick' email to the science editors next morning. I didn't feel the urge to also notify local, they could find out from science or ask me. I felt a bit bad lying to the team I like, but it was

better than talking to the team I don't.

It was a big relief to just sit at home and not worry. I didn't check the news all week, and my pad didn't beep at me to warn me that anything big was going on in the world. That was fine with me, I didn't want the interruption from playing Assassin's Creed 3, or 4 towards the end of the week.

On Tuesday, I was just at a good bit on Assassin's Creed 3, when I heard some raised voices downstairs. I tried to ignore it, but after a minute or two it sounded like there was a fight going on. I picked up my lenstop, ready to get it to call the police if I thought there was some real domestic violence going on, as it could have just been the TV or something.

When I heard a thud and the wall shook, that was definitely my cue to call the police. I called and gave them the address, and as I was talking to them, I heard a really loud bang, the woman on the phone heard it too, and told me she was sending a couple of police cars to the scene. I looked out of the window, and could see that the loud bang had been the front door being bashed open, and a naked man I'd never seen before was running down the street, chased by Patrick, the guy from downstairs. I pushed the live video stream from my lenstop to the police, so they'd have it as evidence.

Patrick stopped chasing the guy, who was round the corner by then, and went back to the house. I heard some more noise that sounded a lot like he was psyching himself up to beat up his wife too. No guessing as to why, but I wasn't going to put up with that.

I stayed with the police on the line, and told them I was going downstairs. The woman told me to stay upstairs, as the police were on their way. I told her no, because if I went down now, I could stop anything happening *before* it happened, not after the event.

I didn't run, but I walked quickly down the stairs, and out of my front door, which was right next to their broken door.

I went in shouting for Patrick and Daisy, and asking if they were both OK. I didn't want to get into a fight, I wanted Patrick to know someone else was there, someone friendly, and not someone to fight with or in front of.

I hadn't made it completely in time, Daisy was lying naked in bed with a discoloured eye, crying hysterically, and Patrick was there

shaking with anger. He told me everything was OK, and I should leave.

I said it didn't look OK, would they like me to get them a cup of tea, or I could get them some ice for her black eye.

Patrick turned to me and told me quite forcefully to get out of the house, and I held up my hands, using all of my journalists tension defusing training, met him with direct eye contact, and told him I'd happily leave, would he like to come with me, I'd take him down the pub for a pint.

No matter how angry you are, it's unlikely your anger will overflow into violence when someone is standing there offering to buy you a drink. He didn't attack me or anything, he just shook his head, and said no, and told me again to leave.

I told him sure, no problem, and backed slowly out of the bedroom. I still had the stream running to the police of course, so the operator woman could see everything that was happening. At that moment, she was telling me in my ear to leave right away, the police were mere seconds away.

I turned and left, and I'd just walked out of the front door when the police pulled up in two cars. I just pointed them inside and stood by my front door while they went in. I hung up with the operator at that point, the police were all there with their cameras, and she didn't need my video stream any more.

One of the police waited outside with me, and asked me some questions. I told him all I could, and related what I'd seen. They brought Patrick outside to cool down, which I expect probably worked, because my lenstop told me it was only about 8 Celsius outside, and he didn't have a jacket on.

I went back inside shortly after, and he was kept outside talking for the next half hour or so. I was pretty shocked to see the police leave in the end, and not cart him off to the nick. He'd just chased a naked guy down the street and punched his wife, that must surely get you something from the police.

Apparently not, though. I was a bit worried he'd come upstairs and beat the crap out of me for calling the police, so I didn't sleep too well that night, but I didn't hear another peep out of them.

Wednesday and Thursday I was a bit tense, I tended to jump at

any loud sound, just in case it was the door coming in, followed by an angry neighbour after my blood. Evie had to work extra hard to distract me from being nervous every evening. Not that she didn't succeed, of course she did, but it wasn't easy for her.

She took Friday off of work so we could spend the day together, and we ended up playing two player on Need for Speed: Throttle, which I hadn't played in over a year so I was rubbish at, and Evie wiped the floor with me. Typical woman though, as soon as I started to get back into it, she decided she'd had enough of the game, and so we stopped playing. I expect I'd have been catching her up within another half an hour.

And don't anyone tell her I said that, I'll be in real trouble :-)

On Friday afternoon, Evie had a surprise for me. She'd been saving it for a few days, because she thought I was a bit tense, and wouldn't be too excited, but now I seemed to be a bit more relaxed she showed me what she'd done.

She'd booked us tickets to a show in May. I'd never heard of it, something called Uncaged Monkeys. I wasn't too impressed at the name, I thought it was some music group, but when I saw what it was, I got quite interested.

It's a science tour, done by Brian Cox, and a number of other famous science and skeptical celebrities. It was on in May in Nottingham, and from what I read about it, it sounded most excellent. It cheered me up quite a lot, which I expect may possibly have been Evie's plan.

She'd spotted I'd been getting really tense and stressed recently, and over things that wouldn't usually get to me. Her solution was a good one, but I still needed to find the actual reason I was getting so stressed out so easily.

That evening, I brought it up with Dr. Smith, and she said it was likely stress from work. If I'm finding work to be more stressful than usual, which she said I obviously was, then it would be likely to translate itself into stress at home too. Nobody can completely switch from stressful work mode to relaxed home mode, it always takes

some time to move from one state of mind to another.

I didn't disagree, it felt like she was dead right. I just haven't got a clue what to do about it, short of quitting my job.

Sunday, March 6th to Saturday, March 12th 2022

Monday

I resisted the urge on Monday to call in sick again, and instead hauled my arse in to the meeting in London. It was riveting, as always, and I got nothing out of it. Seb, my science editor, told me there was a Reaction Engines press conference on Wednesday, and he'd like me to go. I laughed and told him I'd already responded to my invite that I was going, so no worries, I'd be happy to, just for him.

I didn't see the need to correct him and tell him it was Tuesday, not Wednesday. He's a nice enough guy, and I didn't want him to feel stupid.

Tuesday

I have to laugh, I really do. You know me, I'm not religious, I don't believe in the supernatural, and I don't believe in any kind of supreme being guiding our lives.

If today has taught me anything, it's taught me that despite that, coincidences really do happen.

It's also taught me that if you keep your eye open for things, you're more likely to spot them.

Tuesday morning, and I was up early to get in to Reaction Engines as early as possible. I wanted to make sure I was there, if not first, then among the first, so I could chat to senior people in the company, get a feel for what's coming next on a bigger scale, not just for the coming press conference. I already knew what this press conference was for, it was the first flight test of the Sabre engine.

I got there at about 9am, for an 11am press conference, yeah I was