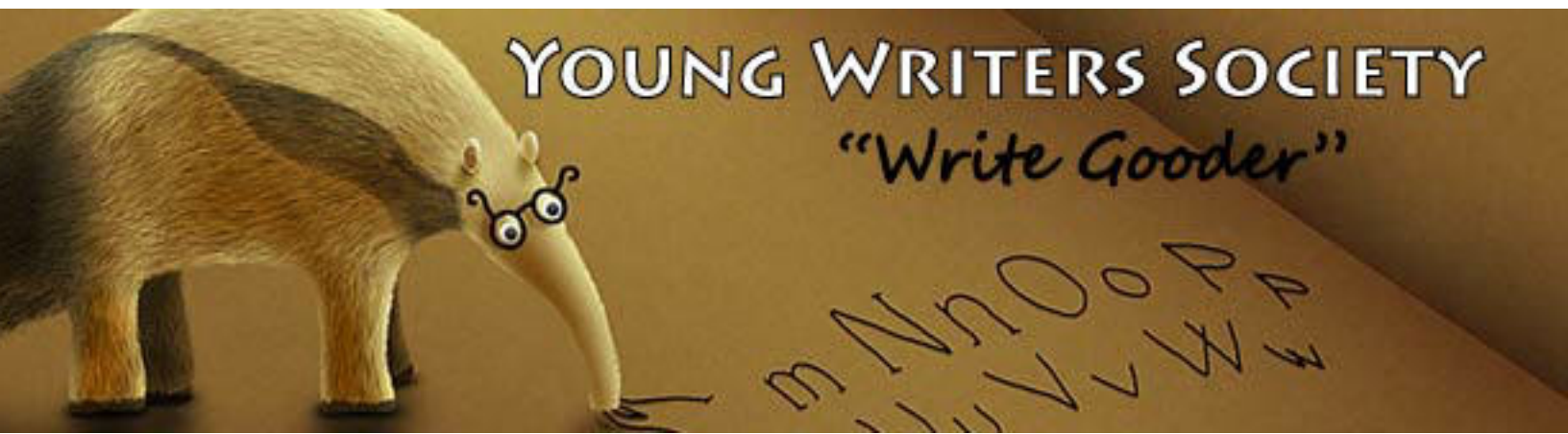


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Young Writers Society
Squills

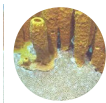
Issue 8, April 2008



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And Much More!



Editor's Note

by Suzanne

Before you read this issue of Squills, I would like you to find the writers and thank them! So many amazing people wrote articles and also received hate mail from me for being slow. Even if I was the one who organized the gathering of the articles, if it wasn't for all the writers, this wouldn't be here at all. And if you find Meshugenah in the chat room, tell her thank you too. She helped me edit!

Many of these articles are the best I've ever seen, and I hope you agree. Squills has always been an exciting thing for me, and this was the first time I was allowed to organize it myself. I have to say, it was a

great experience, especially because I received so many amazing articles! I hope the writers enjoyed it as much as I did, and with the next issue, I hope to see them all writing again and I hope to see you sending me an article, too! We always have room for more in Squills, and new voices are appreciated. So if there is something else you think Squills needs, write it!

Finally, I would like to thank Nate for allowing me to work on it and for putting all of the articles together. I'll stop boring you—we need to get to the most important part of Squills. The readers!

Site Announcements

Buy the Young Writers Literary Journal!

The Young Writers Literary Journal is now available for your buying pleasure at:
<http://stores.lulu.com/yws>

User Subdomains

All YWS members now get their own subdomain! Just type <http://youname.youngwriterssociety.com>. However, be forewarned that if you have space in your name, it will not always work. Thus, feel free to contact

Nate to have your name changed if and only if you have a space.

The YWS Literary Awards

The very first YWS literary awards have finished up. You can find the results at the Young Writers Society in The Lounge area (under the Community area). If you didn't make it this year, don't worry. Adam_Atlantian will be running it again next year.

The Backup Site

If you haven't already, join the back-up site at <http://yws.nathancaldwell.com>. YWS still experiences downtime every now and then so that's our back-up.

Congrats to Gadi!

Gadi was chosen as the featured poetry member of March due to his contributions in February. Congratulations!

Need An Expert?

Check out the expert lists in the Poetry & Fiction discussion areas under the Writing area.

Join A Group!

Joining a group is easy. Just go to YWS Groups (it's under the Community button at the top), then scroll through the list until you find one you like. Click on it, then look for the Join button. There are groups for every interest, so there is bound to be one for you.

The Holy Grail of Plot and Characters

by Kylan

The two elusive, crucial characteristics any good story needs are a gripping plot line and relatable characters. Action and reaction; the stuff on the page and the people on the page. At some time in your life, you'll look at your writing and see that the equilibrium between character and plot is skewed. That's okay, no one's perfect. Maybe you have too much plot and cardboard characters. One trait may dominate over the other. How do you maintain that balance? How do you construct good characters and hold the reigns on your plot – however nonexistent – at the same time? It's hopeless, isn't it? Well, I come bearing hope. These holy grails are not so out of reach, after all. Hang up your whip and your fedora, my friends. There are no pitfalls or poisonous snakes where we're heading.

Finding the balance between your characters and your plot is like finding a balance between, say, your social life and your writing life. It's hard. That's the long and short of it. Authors may spend their entire lives striving for harmony in their writing and never find it. They still get published, and Dan Brown is a testament to that. Stories like *The Da Vinci Code* have brilliant plots, but terrible characters. So don't lose hope.

At any rate, there is a scale – a continuum, if you will – with pure plot on one end, and pure characters on the other. It's like left wing and right wing politics. The extreme of the right – anarchism – and the extreme on the left – hardcore socialism – are both flawed forms of government and they'll inevitably result in war, killing citizens. Politically, most people are somewhere in the

middle or on the outskirts of the middle. And in the story, middle is divine.

Of course, there are certain genres that demand extremes. Thrillers and suspense pieces tend to be plot oriented, whereas romance or literary works tend to be character driven. There is a time and a place for everything. Still, no one will be satisfied with pure plot or pure character. The continuum is just slightly different for thrillers and romance.

First, in order to establish a balance, you've got to know your genre. Take Bob, one of our writerly models. Bob is writing a thriller. He gets halfway through, reads what he's written, and discovers his main character has as much personality as Paris Hilton. His plot is pretty good though, and he's thrown in some good twists and turns. Nevertheless, after reading Kylan's advice, he decides equilibrium must be achieved between his plot and his characters. He realizes that in order to give his character more personality, he needs to get into his characters mind and exploit it a little further to his audience. Dialogue is a good band-aid for suffering MCs [Main Characters]. Dialogue provides immediate, show-don't-tell, insight into how your character thinks and how he interacts with other people. Bob studies how the people he interacts with talk and gets a good idea of how to write dialogue. Make dialogue indirect and avoid clichés like the plague. Have your characters joke around a little, swear a little, have fun, and then stick your reader with the point. Bob knows that dialogue should read how real people talk.

But dialogue is only one thing Bob could do to improve his character.

Sal, our second writerly model, is working on a romance novel. Her characters are practically three-dimensional, but they seem to be loitering in literary doldrums. Sal decides she needs to add some conflict. In order to entertain your audience your MC needs to be strained, pulled, or changed throughout the course of the story. Bad and good things need to happen. And how they react to these things determines both the plot and the characters. Another way to jump-start plot is to take a common idea and turn it upside down. Take Meyer's *Twilight* series. Though the quality of her characters could be debated, Meyer's trilogy is a perfect example of spinning old ideas. Girl falls in love with vampire! How could you not squeeze a plot out of that? Sal decides she needs to shake things up and make life miserable for her characters (and redeem them in the end) in order to fix her plot.

Anyway, Bob and Sal will proceed to revise their stories to appease the continuum. Take a page out of their books, and keep an eye on the quality of your plot and your characters. I lied; there are many pitfalls here. Clichés and banality are around every corner in the categories of both plot and character. They murder stories. Watch out for them, avoid them, and exterminate them. And if all goes well, you can find the grails and achieve the balance.

Interview with kitty15

by Jasmine Hart

1) I'll start at the beginning. When and how did you find YWS?

The when part is easy – fifteenth of May 2007 – but the how could take some explaining. I was browsing the guest book on 'The Young Writers Club' and came across an old entry where the link to this site had been posted a few hundred times. Now, I've never been a big fan of 'spam' – who is? – so I decided to follow the link and discourage the poster from repeating the offence. Naturally, when I arrived at the site, I realised that no 'real' member of YWS would do such a thing and I looked around and liked what I saw so I decided to join.

2) What was it that made you join?

As I said, I liked what I saw. The reviews given were constructive and helpful, the standard of writing was generally high and there was a real sense of community.

3) You've recently been chosen as a Junior Moderator. Does this change how you look at and relate to the site? What's been the best thing about it?

I think it has changed my priorities around the site. Before, I concentrated on storybooks a lot but now, I try to spend time greeting the new members and reading their early posts on the forums. I'm not a stalker, really! The best part of being a moderator is the sense of accomplishment. Nate does so much for this site and it's nice to be able to pay him back by helping out.

4) You're one of the busiest critics on YWS. How do you balance critiquing with your own writing, and other occupations and activities?

I'm not sure to be honest but I have a somewhat functional system. Day time and Saturdays is

generally time that I spend doing my college work or socialising with friends except for the occasional lunch break when everyone else is in class. Then, on an evening, I spend time on here. Where critiquing is concerned, I try to write at least one a day and priority goes to any requested privately so people should feel free to send me a request or two.

5) Have you posted any pieces on YWS of which you are especially proud?

I'm quite fond of 'Our Beach' which was actually inspired by the site and I experimented with a looser format which worked really well.

6) What would you rank as your greatest achievement as a writer?

It would have to be the joint novel my sister and I wrote. I love the humour and the complexity the plot has. I have hopes that it will one day be published.

7) Have you any writing projects planned for this year?

Oh yes, quite a few. I have about six or seven ideas that I'd like to work with, as well as some plans for novels and animation scripts that my sister and I have made. The priority is a joint novel about sirens that's filled with romance, tragedy and deceit but I also have this really cool idea of writing a dark, futuristic book about the possibilities of an anorexic society. I've written part of a scene already and I'm really excited about my idea to have the option of regurgitating your food at restaurants. Scary, huh?

8) What, in your opinion, are the greatest and worst aspects of being a writer?

The greatest feeling in the world is knowing that

you've completed the base of a novel or a poem. After that there's the editing of course but seeing something that has a beginning, a middle and an end is just great. And I love it when my characters surprise me. They really do develop their own personalities. The worst aspect of being a writer, in my opinion, is when you have the urge to write but can't think of a theme or an idea or even a character. I find that so frustrating!

9) What would you say is your greatest strength as a writer, and is there anything you'd like to improve on? If so, have you an idea as to how you will go about this?

That's a difficult question and one that the people who critique my work could probably answer better than me. I think I'm best at ideas. There are so many brilliant novels I want to write and the plots are generally original and unique which is great but I have trouble compelling them to paper sometimes. I lack the commitment of an author. I'll start writing a novel and then I'll either fall in love with another idea or I'll decide that the plot really isn't strong enough to survive to the end. I've already found one way to avoid that – write with a partner – but I'm hoping that I'll be able to motivate myself to complete a novel on my own at some point in the next two years.

10) What do you most enjoy writing and why?

At the moment, I think I prefer prose over poetry and lyrics. As for genre, it's more what I don't like to write than what I do and even then, I find myself mixing bits of pieces from other genres into my plots. For example, my recent short story is historical fiction which

was really fun to write because I love the atmosphere of history that you can create through descriptions and old dialects and sometimes it's just so much more interesting to give your characters swords instead of lasers. However, the story also incorporates some dark fiction, some humour and even a touch of science fiction because it's set in a distinct period but with some slight alterations.

11) *And finally, have you any advice for new writers?*

For new writers, I'd say don't be disheartened if your first few novels and

poems aren't perfect. It takes time to find and develop the style of writing that you're most comfortable with and even when you have it, some days you're going to write complete rubbish but that's okay because there's always time to edit later. For all writers in general, I advise you to write with a purpose. Whether that be to inform, to enlighten, to scare, to amaze or to entertain, just remember that a poem or piece of prose is written for two people – the reader and the writer.

Movie Review: Juno by Via

In December of 2007, Juno jumped to the third best movie of the year. Amazingly enough, it made the list at third place before it even released to the general public [Christmas Day]. But I must tell you, with a storyline and a soundtrack as wonderful as this, Juno should have easily beat out Atonement for the second place.

Juno is a film filled with dry comedy; canned laughter has no place in this quirky script. As we all know from the trailer, teenagers Juno MacGuff and Paulie Bleaker get themselves into a bit of a bind with an unplanned pregnancy. Ellen Page and Michael Cera absolutely shine at these roles. In fact, Ellen Page managed to successfully pull off not one, not two, but three pregnancy movies all in 2007. Not an easy task my friends! The two stars are accompanied by more stars of their own sort with Jennifer Gardner as childless Vanessa Loring, Jason Bateman as childless Mark Loring, Alison Janney as Juno's stepmother and dog lover Bren MacGuff, and J.K. Simmons as Juno's father Mac MacGuff (go figure!).

Juno and Paulie pull off an all star script with amazing one-liners that I will remember for the rest of my life. This is definitely a film all teenagers will enjoy as well as those few adults left who can look at something with an open mind. But if you are looking for actual jokes to make you

laugh, then you might as well be watching Napoleon Dynamite: neither one will do the trick.

Juno also made a few other, less-known names come to the attention of the world. The soundtrack was released before the theatrical release in 2007 and has sold very well. The introduction song to the film is a song called "All I Want Is You" by Barry Louis Polisar. This song is also done over by Juno and Paulie later on in the film. This seems to be the one song everyone is talking about (I don't know about you, but it's on my Myspace!). But the real breakout story behind the soundtrack is artist Kimya Dawson, who has a total of five songs on the play list. We see big things in her future thanks to Juno!

So far, Juno has been nominated for 4 Oscars, 1 Eddie, 3 Golden Globes, 1 Breakthrough Award, 1 Writer's Guild Award and 37 other awards: 22 of which the film won. This is an amazing film and the soundtrack is equally astonishing. If you see one movie this year, this is it! I recommend it to anyone and everyone who has yet to see it! It is truly amazing and will stand the test of time!



In select theatres December

Pirate of the Month

Edward England by Saint Razorblade

Edward England was probably one of the most generous pirates in history. He was known as the “Merciful Pirate” for his reluctance to kill captives when such an act was unnecessary; a trait unfavoured by pirates and which inevitably led to his death.

England (birth date unknown), ironically hailing from Ireland and whose real surname was Seegar, began his career as a pirate while working as first mate on a sloop (a small, fast, one-masted ship popular amongst pirates). On a voyage from Jamaica to Province, the sloop was attacked and taken by pirate Captain Winter. England gained the trust of the pirates and soon became one of them.

England spent the beginning of his time as a pirate in the Caribbean, but after refusing the

King’s Pardon, he was forced out and into Africa to continue his piracy career. An attack from governor of the Bahamas, Woodes Rogers, instigated the drastic change in England’s home waters.

In Africa, England found a lot of success and began to build a fleet, starting with the sloop “Cadogan,” pirated from Captain Skinner of Bristol. Skinner had a bad reputation as a pirate. He owed many of his fellows debts and there was a lot of anger directed his way. As a result, he was tortured and killed when England took his ship. Also aboard the “Cadogan” was Howell Davis, who later became a very successful pirate. England gave Davis command of the Cadogan, and officially had the beginnings of his own fleet.

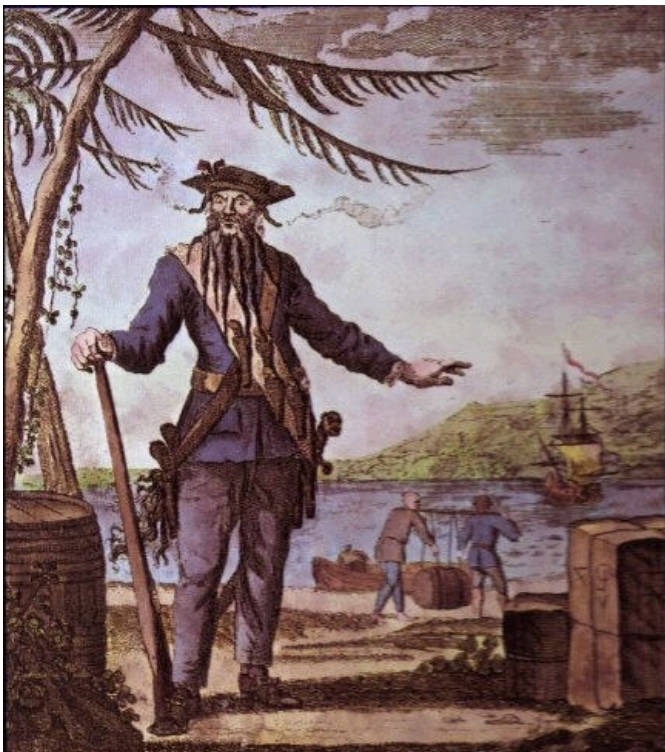
After a time, England made his first flagship exchange. He took over a ship named “Pearl,” which he refitted and renamed “Royal James.” England and his pirates were even more successful aboard this flagship, and this exchange truly laid the way for England’s own fleet. The newfound mini-pirate army continued to plunder African waters as well as the Caribbean.



In the spring of 1719, one of England’s last years as an active pirate, he and his fleet returned to Africa, seizing several ships at Cape Corso. Some of these ships and their crews were simply robbed and then set free. Others were taken over and added to England’s ever-growing fleet. The remaining ships were destroyed, primarily through fire. During this time, however, two ships from the fleet, “Queen Anne’s Revenge” and “Flying King” were separated from England’s flagship, departing for the Caribbean.

For the second time, England traded flagships. The far more powerful Dutch ship “Fancy” replaced “Royal James” as England’s primary vessel.

England’s next move took place at the island of Madagascar. A couple of successful “actions” increased England’s already massive power—although exactly what these were remains unclear. However, it was 1720 when the pirates travelled to Johanna, and island not far from Madagascar. There, they encountered and attacked three ships—two



English and one Dutch—belonging to the East Indies Company.

Two ships managed to escape, but Captain James Macrae's "Cassandra" stayed to fight with Captain England's fleet. The battle lasted hours, even after both ships were run aground. Captain Macrae was forced to escape to the shore, leaving his precious ship behind. The "Fancy," on the other hand, was completely destroyed, and the pirates had taken many more casualties than their enemy.

After a few days, Captain Macrae finally surrendered to the pirates who had been hounding and

starving him. Captain England's first mate, John Taylor, suggested killing him in order to revenge the approximate 90 pirate casualties from the battle aboard the ships. However, the Merciful Pirate did not agree. He knew Macrae was a courageous, honourable man and wanted to spare him. It took a few hours of persuasion and several shots of rum, but Taylor finally agreed. The pirates took the "Cassandra" as their prize rather than Macrae's life.

The Merciful Pirate's crew, however, were not so happy about such a decision. They were pirates, after all, bloodthirsty and violent. Captain Macrae

escaping with his life was not an idea that sat well with them. They raised a mutiny against England and marooned him on Mauritius with three of the Captain's loyal followers.

Not to be deterred, England somehow managed to craft a boat and sailed to Saint Augustine's Bay, Madagascar. He died there sometime in 1721, alone and poor, a generous pirate doomed to a cruel destiny.

(Thanks to www.thewayofthepirates.com for information)

Book Review: A Thousand Splendid Suns by Gadi

A Thousand Splendid Suns by Khaled Hosseini

Pages: 372

Published in: 2007

Price: \$25.95

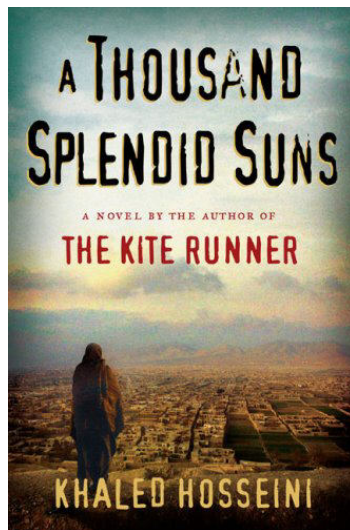
Rate: C

Khaled Hosseini is a master at recreating a culture on paper: his first novel, *The Kite Runner*, is a spectacular, poignant magnum opus that tells a story of brutality and hope in Taliban-run Afghanistan. His new book, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, does not compare with *The Kite Runner*. It is a poor replica filled with the identical malice and hope we witnessed in his first book. His attempt at emotion is meager and arrogant. The only good part of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is the genius and genuine demonstration of culture that rings throughout the book.

The book is about two women sharing the same house and the same cruel husband over a period of thirty years. In the beginning, they are hostile

to each other, but as the plot moves along they develop a friendship. It is a story about companionship under dire conditions, full of haunting images and modern-day significance.

However, it is simply an unrealistic portrayal, a



chain of misfortune that is impractical at most. It is written with reader-friendly sentences that is full of description, flashbacks, and symbolism. This way of writing made some scenes pathetically banal, while leaving other, less important scenes over dramatic.

This is a nonsense novel, straight adversity page after page. It is void of the same sentimental quality we encountered in *The Kite Runner*. Even though the book is engaging, the story and its presentation were torturous. The book was so telling that it was easy to predict key points in the story several chapters ahead of time. Laila and Mariam, the two main characters, are flat and unconvincing, while the complexity the topic required was completely missing.

A Thousand Splendid Suns had the potential to be a literary masterpiece, but in the end, it was a repetitive, miserable story that reeked of mainstream soap operas and excruciating clichés. I am awed and shocked at its critical and commercial success.

YWS Adventures Update

by Adam_Atlantian

The Writer Galaxy slowly grows little by little. Stars are born; planets form and entire civilizations sprout forth from the depths of cyberspace. At last the game is starting to pull together. Ship designs are vast and plentiful along with planets. As many know the contest held last year to create a planet didn't really have a big success with only two entries. However it allowed me to have two new planets for the Galaxy.

The New planets are:

Tentorai – Tentorai is much like Earth. There are several different climates and ecosystems. A humanoid species known as Kentai are the dominate species, but they live in peace with the other species that roam the main landmass of the planet. Majority of the planet is covered by an ocean, which is dotted with unexplored islands, though the Kentai will swear to you that the islands only bring death and to visit any is against their most sacred laws. (created by Reakeda)

Quetzalcoatl – The land of Quetzalcoatl is a mixture of solid flatness and rising mountains that creates low valleys. Surrounding these valleys and mountains is the jungle wilderness that makes Quetzalcoatl such a mysterious planet. The sporadic presence of water is only ever

found in low valleys with few lakes and no seas in existence – to the current knowledge of the inhabitants. Almost 70% of the large planet has been unexplored due to the dense jungle (created by PenguinAttack)

New Features

This will be a completely player influenced game. In other words, you the player will have a

choose what spells will be most useful in battle. The same system will be used for non-magic abilities on characters such as warriors and thieves.

Another feature to be included will be a fully interactive environment. This means that when you see that barrel in the street you can pick it up, blast it with magic and toss it

about. This is to

allow players more freedom in game. By moving a crate or destroying it you might find a new item or maybe even a secret passage. This interactive concept will also be applied to villages and buildings. While I strongly discourage this, players will be able to perform

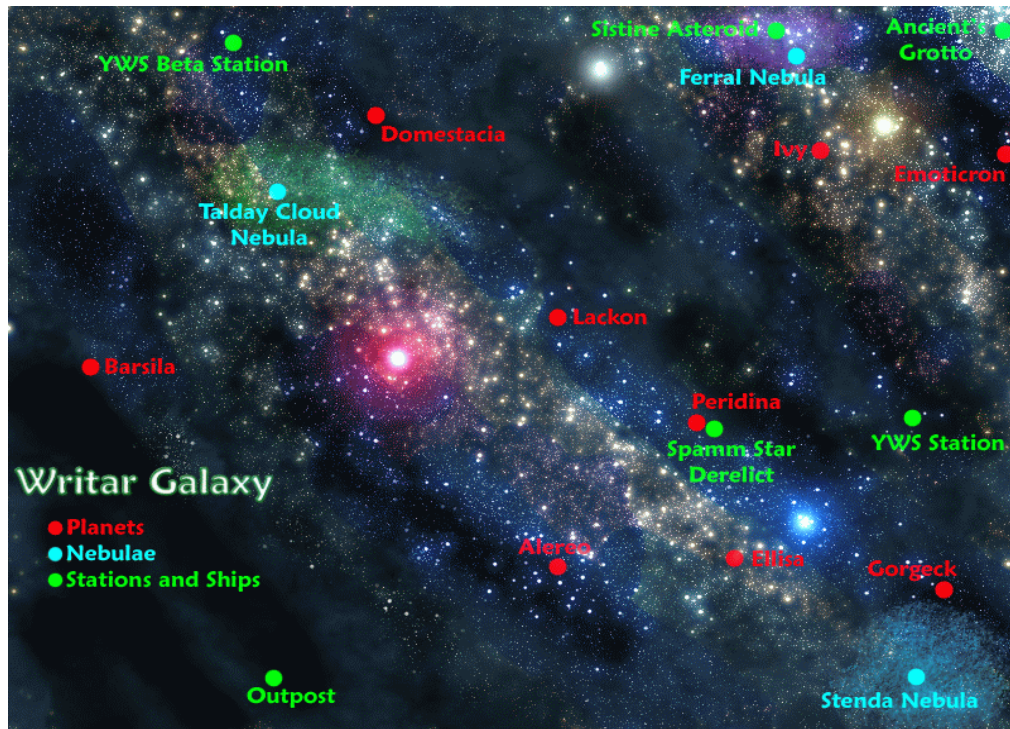
attacks and raids

direct impact on the galaxy. Space battles, planetary battles all will have an impact. Even NPC missions will generate some kind of effect.

The magic system is something I am rather proud of. It will take full advantage of the numeric keypad on the keyboard. Obviously a character will learn more than nine spells, but in order to use certain ones they must be assigned to one of the nine keys. This should make for interesting and strategic game play as players will have to

on towns and ports. This adds more to the player-influenced world due to the many pirates that will inhabit the galaxy. What this will also mean is that planetary assault is indeed a possibility.

Chatspeak nullifier is a nifty idea I am playing with that will identify various chatspeak and auto corrects them. Or maybe even negate the entry of text until the user types it correct-



ly. As I said, this is geared towards writers and correct spelling and word usage is part of that.

Possible this Year

Planning and production are a constant process running along side each other. I do have hopes of a working demo sometime this year that will allow a single player to explore a planet and fight off a monster or two. This is not set in stone, but indeed something to be watching out for.

Community Involvement

The game itself is geared toward writers, and as such I want some community involvement from YWS. That is why you will often see oddly named contests such as Wonderfully Wrecking Weapons (Currently being held in the contest forum at YWS) These are Galaxy Contests. They're main purpose is to generate community involvement and create an anticipation for the game. They also provide valuable user input on what players would like to see in game. Held every month each contest will allow users to come up with some sort of object or item that will be implemented in the game

with their name by it. Some that will be coming up in the months of February and March are Splendidly Speedy Spaceships and Immensely Imaginative Items. I look forward to the entries as they are very interesting.

The winning entry will receive a critique from me and of course whatever item they created will be used in game.

Corporate News

Not that I am officially a corporation, but it sounds nice. I, Adam_Atlantian am now opening my own business known as Atlantean Images. This means a number of things for the game. For one it will be known as an AI product. For another the game will be very much open to anyone and everyone who can access it. This is both good and bad. Good in a since that it will help add growth and revenue to YWS. Bad in that it will attract uber gamers who use the dreaded chatspeak. Hopefully the new features will help against that.

That's all for updates at this time. Keep an eye out for more to come, including a YWA website!

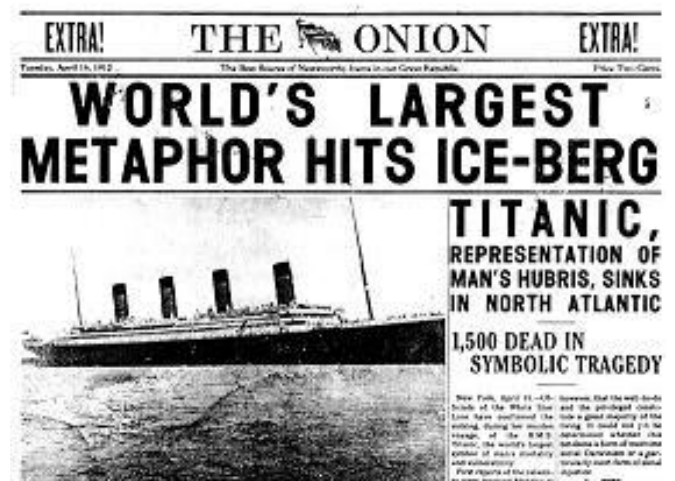
Metaphors by Incandescence

So often when new poets begin writing poetry, they treat it like Show & Tell in kindergarten. They begin with a subject, their "show," and then proceed to describe that subject by "telling" us its properties.

This works in essays, but if I were to try to describe someone to you and said, "They have some skin, a scrape on their elbow, dark brown hair and green eyes, a red shirt, ...", you would quickly become bored. Why? Because everyone has or has had at some point in their life skin, scrapes, hair, eyes, shirts, and so on and so forth.

While this description of the person may be very true, we still feel as though we hardly know them.

This is where the power of metaphor comes in--what is a metaphor, you ask? A metaphor is a direct comparison between two or more unlike things. In poetry, a sensory metaphor--one that takes our "show" and compares it back to something we can imagine or have experienced before--is a critical tool for the poet as it triggers physical feelings that lead to emotional arousal. While these are used to great avail, an extended metaphor--a single metaphor that is used and developed throughout the entire poem--is far more popular. Here's an example of an extended metaphor which is also sensory:



"My love is a red rose of the heart
Bleeding petals of life's breath
Thorns that rip love apart
Ragged, in the garden of death."

Notice how the poem, instead of directly describing the poet's capacity for love, describes the red

rose. From this metaphor, we know not only that his or her love is a difficult clime, but we also have a very physical and visual ("sensory") picture of the poet's heart.

School, Life & Writing

by Chocoholic

The holidays have ended, and you have to go back to school. But you don't want to work on equations or run laps, you just want to sit down with a pen and paper or a computer and write away. And then when you get home you have to

set that table, and don't forget about cleaning the dishes!

School cuts into your writing time a lot. Or does it? I find that I do more writing during the school year than on the holidays. Of course, it may just be that I never have much homework and my parents don't

care about having a clean house, but it's not true. In fact, I usually get quite a bit of homework and I have quite a few tasks around the house. And then there's the TV.

So how do you do it? How do you write novels, poems and short stories without letting the work pile up and your grades slip? Well I'll tell you how I did it!

Many writing books will tell you to set a specific writing time and stick to it, but I'm here to say, forget them. I write when I want. Sure, if I'm in the middle of a very hard maths question, writing

probably isn't something I should be doing, but why not? Take a break, do some writing, and then go back to your homework. You'll probably find that it's easier now that you've let your work sit for a while.

those funny little characters? Yes, letters! I don't know about you, but I seem to do more writing in maths than actual maths. This is because I have to write the questions into my workbook. It may not be exactly what you

want, but at least you're writing.

But what about those times where a really cool idea springs to mind and you just have to start writing it down? Well, carry a little notebook round with you to write ideas into. Or if you don't have that, write it on the back page of your workbook and then take it home and begin writing.

If you really need to write an actual story in class, there are a few ways of

doing this. I find the easiest is to get ahead on my work so I can have free time during class, which I use to read and write. Another way is to have your story saved on your USB, wait until your class goes into a computer room and write it then. (Note: if you haven't finished your work you will get in trouble when caught!)

So, the next time you're stuck doing homework or sitting in science and you want to write, you can!



Now, chores are a bit harder to get out of than homework is. Teachers aren't there with you at home, but your parents are. Prioritize! Knock back a few of your tasks when you get home, and leave some to the weekend, where you'll have all day. Just make sure you do them.

"These are all well and good for when I'm at home, but what about when I'm stuck in a classroom?" I hear you ask? Well I have the solution to that as well.

What is maths to you? Numbers. Exactly. But take a closer look at your textbook. What are

Why You Have No Idea What Your Poem Is About

by Leja

If you're like me, the process of idea—> poem probably goes something like this:

- idea
- bothering idea
- random line
- random idea lines surrounding it
- connecting lines between everything
- read through
- BAM! poem

Say you wrote a poem about flowers. Everyone likes flowers, yes? Good. Me too. Glad we're on the same page. Your lines might have included something about the way the petal curves, or how the leaves on the stem are green, or how a bee landed in the center, but after you get through all of that, did you really write anything?

Most of the time, the answer's no. You might have begun with the intent to compare flowers to computers. You might have included images of program windows unfolding like flower petals in the early morning sun. But that could have been it. Instead, you might have gone off on a stretch about insects and snakes and other garden variety animals that have nothing to do with computers. You could probably relate everything back to your original idea if you made a stretch, but if you have to think for a moment about how each image relates back to the main idea, you probably got lost in your writing.

That's okay, things like that happen. Just make sure they don't happen when you think you've

got everything all straightened out! The best advice I ever received on a poem was, "your original meaning seems to be a little skewed in any case, so maybe you should work on clarifying your intent a bit more within this poem." Originally, I thought to myself "I wrote this poem! How could I not know what it means?" Upon further reflection, and many re-readings of my poem, I realized that no, I had no idea what I was trying to

write about. It was like writing about flowers when I was really trying to write about computers. Except I wasn't even writing about flowers either!

To fix this you first have to realize that you don't know what you're saying. It may happen when you can't defend your word or phrase choice to someone. You might even realize it when you're reading back through the poem yourself! In any case, once you realize that you don't know what you're talking about, you must do something so that you DO know what you're writing about. This could happen a number of ways. You could brainstorm it, going back to the beginning and reworking everything (like pushing the air out of a tube of toothpaste). If you have a friend who knows enough about your poem, you can talk



through it. Even if they don't know what your poem's about, the simple act of talking through your idea can help you sort it out for yourself.

Hopefully, you now will not only be able to identify where you've lost track of your poem, but also have the ability to steal it back from the dark abyss that is confused poetry.

Happy writing!