

THIRTY DAYS

by

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(for NaNoWriMo 2010)

I am writing 'Thirty Days' for National Novel Writing Month 2010. I am also writing it to raise money for charity. The specific charity that I want to help is St Luke's Hospice (Harrow and Brent). They provide care and support to terminally ill patients and their families from the Harrow and Brent areas of north London, regardless of their background. In May 2009 my father sadly passed away, but his final days were made more comfortable by St Luke's, and I'm grateful for the care that they gave him and the support that they gave to my family. And so I would like to raise some money for them as my way of saying thanks. You can find out more about St Luke's via their website at www.stlukes-hospice.org

If you would like to sponsor me you can do so via my Just Giving page at www.justgiving.com/karlsgreen I and St Luke's will be grateful for anything that you're able to give.

And finally, I've also set up a page on Facebook about the novel where I'll be posting any news about what I'm doing, and you can find it at <http://bit.ly/9OfC6p>

This file, and all other chapters, will be made available on my website at <http://www.karlsgreen.co.uk/thirtydays> You may freely distribute this file subject to the following two conditions:

1. You do not alter the file in any way, shape, or form.
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DAY FOURTEEN

THE WRITER AND THE WRITE-IN

There was one world within her mind that stood out from all of the rest. It lay at the heart of a galaxy towards the centre of her universe. This world was larger than most inhabited worlds, but had a low density, and, as such, lower gravity than would normally be expected for a world as large as this one. Its gravity was comparable to that of most inhabited worlds.

This world had a vast and diverse population on it - over twenty billion people lived there. They were also a highly advanced civilisation, far more advanced than anything that even she had seen before.

Within her mind she often visited this world, and marvelled at what it was that they were able to achieve.

She was amazed further when she saw that they were able to think for themselves, to be able to take their own actions without having to be instructed by her.

Among these people were a great many philosophers. One of these had met her on many occasions. And he started to think about her.

He thought about her a lot, and started to think more about her place within his world...

The Apocolynium - XIV

The writer woke up at 10am on the fourteenth day. And he was feeling extremely tired. He had gone to bed on the previous night at 3am, which, recently for him, was relatively early. He wanted to stay in bed, he needed more sleep, but he eventually forced himself to get up. He knew that if he stayed in bed until late today he'd have trouble getting to sleep tonight, and then trouble in getting up tomorrow, when he would have to go back to work after a two week break.

He was dreading that. His efforts over the last two weeks, where he had amassed 65,000 words over 13 days, had exhausted him. But he had planned to have done more, far more, by this stage. He was aiming to have written 150,000 words by the end of the month, which was an average of 5,000 words per day. But, as he was back at work tomorrow, and knew that it wouldn't be possible to do a full day's work and then come home and write 5,000 words, he knew that he was going to fall behind. He would just have to write a lot more words over the last two weekends of the month, and he knew that was going to be a tall order.

But first he had today. He had decided to go along to his first ever write-in. He had never been to one before, preferring to always write on his own at home instead. However, recently he had found that he was getting far too easily distracted at home, with things like Facebook and Twitter, and the mountains of TV programmes that he had recorded to watch. He felt that if he went to the write-in then it would force him to actually get on and write. It would also give him the chance to meet up with some of his friends that would be there, many of whom he mostly interacted with via the internet.

He was able to catch the train that he had been intending to catch, and was still feeling really tired. He closed his eyes for a bit, but was careful to not actually fall asleep whilst he was on the train. Sleep would have felt like such bliss, but he knew that he was unlikely to feel the bliss of a really good night's sleep again until the 1st December, which is when he was planning to use his last day of annual leave for the year. By then he knew that was going to badly need some time to recover from his NaNoWriMo exploits.

All that aside, he was looking forward to the write-in, to seeing his friends, and to getting more of his writing done. He was aiming to get another 5,000 words done that day. If he could end the day on 70,000 words then his dream of reaching 150,000 words by the end of the month would still be alive.

He arrived at the write-in's location early. It was at a branch of Costa Coffee below a branch of Waterstones in Piccadilly. He had found the location with relative ease. Often he found that when he came into central London he often got a little lost whilst he tried to work out what exit he was supposed to take from whichever station he was arriving at. But he had no such problems today.

He spent a little time looking around the branch of Paperchase that was also in this branch of Waterstones – he often liked to buy nice notebooks to write in, although he found that he rarely got around to actually writing in them.

He then went down to the Costa Coffee, where he quickly spotted some of his friends. He went up to them, and they started chatting about his progress so far. However, he found that he was so tired he was actually having difficulty getting his words out of his mouth. If he was this bad now, he dreaded what he was going to be like by the end of the month.

He then saw a couple enter the room, holding hands. He remembered that he had seen both of them before, back at one of the kick-off parties. Only they hadn't been a couple then. He surmised that they must have got to know each other after the party, and had since got together. He smiled at this thought, and was happy for them.

For Steve's and Natasha's part, they were both still blissfully happy, and still blissfully unaware that they were not yet fully out of danger. They saw a few faces that they recognised from the kick-off party. 'Shall we go and say hello?' asked Natasha.

'Sure,' replied Steve.

They saw the writer, the one aiming for 150,000 words, and went up to him. 'Hi,' said

Natasha, 'Do you remember me from the kick-off party?'

'Yeah, I remember you. Natasha, isn't it?' She nodded. 'And you're Steve, aren't you?'

'Yep, that's me.'

'So, how are you two finding NaNoWriMo? This is the first time for both of you, isn't it?'

'Yeah,' said Natasha. 'It hasn't been going too badly, although I am a little behind. I'm hoping that I'll be able to catch up on a bit of it here.'

Steve then said, 'Unfortunately I've fallen quite a bit behind. I was, well, caught up with something else this past week, and I've also been a little unwell. But I'm not going to give up yet. It's going to be a bit of an uphill struggle, but I'm still hopeful that I'll be able to make it to 50k by the end of the month.'

'How about you?' asked Natasha. 'You were going for 150k, weren't you? How's that working out for you?'

The writer sighed, and then said, 'The next time I say I'm going to try and write 150,000 words in a month you all have my permission to shoot me. In fact, that's a standing order! You will be required to do so!'

'Oh, that bad? But you're on, what, about 65k by now?'

'Yeah, managed to get there by about 3am last night, which was relatively early for me.'

'Well, that's not bad, you're on target for 150k by the 30th.'

'Yeah, I know, but I've had the last two weeks off of work, and I'll be back tomorrow. Hopefully I'll get 5k done today - probably not all of it here, but hopefully most of it. But from tomorrow I'm likely to start falling behind. I can't do a full day's work and then come home and write 5,000 words, it just can't be done. But I've got a plan. If I can get to 70k today, then tomorrow, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, I'm going to try and do 3,500 words, and then another 5,000 on Friday. Everything will then rely on what I can get done at the weekend. I'll need to do 8,750 words on each of the four weekend days left this month. If I can do that, then I still have a chance of getting to 150k by the end of the month.'

'Oh, good luck with that!'

'Thanks, I think I'm gonna need it!'

Steve then said, 'No disrespect, but I think that you're completely mad!'

'Yeah, I know. I tell you what, I'm never going to try and write this much in a month again!'

The writer then went off to speak to some more of his friends, whilst Steve and Natasha went to find a couple of seats. They got out their laptops, and plugged them in to one of the power strips that one of the other wrimos had brought along. They started them up, and then loaded up their novels so far.

‘So,’ said Steve, ‘How much do you think you’ll be able to get done today?’

‘I don’t know, a two or three thousand maybe. It will just be good to get back to it after everything that’s happened. How about you?’

‘I’ll probably do about the same, maybe a little less. It’s going to be odd getting back to it, it’s been a while since I’ve been able to write any of it. It’s also going to feel a little strange writing it because I’m writing a fantasy novel that has some dragons in it, and we’re just recovering from having dealt with a real life Dragon Keeper!’

Natasha thought for a moment, and then asked, ‘Why do you think she’s referred to as that? Throughout everything that happened, at least as far as I’m aware, there weren’t any dragons involved at any stage.’

‘I don’t know. Do you think that we’ll be able to find out by using our powers?’

‘Can’t do any harm to try.’

They then both closed their eyes and shifted their awareness towards the direction of the Dragon Keeper and her past, but they found that they couldn’t see anything. Everything was coming up as a blur and they couldn’t make anything out. All that they could see was the colour red. Lots and lots of red.

The writer was looking at them as they did this, and was intrigued by it. He could see that their eyes were closed, but he could tell that underneath their eyes were moving rapidly, their movement was clearly apparent under their eyelids. He also saw that they were holding each other’s hands, something that they themselves were not even aware of. He thought that they looked really sweet together, as though they just got each other. He envied them this. He then got back to thinking about the characters from his own novel.

Steve and Natasha brought their awareness back to where they were now, and they opened their eyes. ‘What did you think that meant?’ asked Natasha.

‘I really don’t know. I’m not sure why we can’t see that, or why we couldn’t see who it was that came to see us when we were babies. I thought we were able to see everything, but some things appear to be blocked off to us. We can ask Lisa and Naomi when we get back, they may know the reason why, and why the Dragon Keeper is called what she is.’

At that point a girl was walking around the room and told everyone that it was now writing time, and everyone got their heads down to write for the next 45 minutes.

During this time the writer made good progress with his novel. He found, to his relief, that he was, for the most part, able to just get on and write. He was using a notebook computer that he

had inherited from his father, who had sadly passed away last year. It had a smaller keyboard than he was used to, and it took him a little while to adapt to it, but, before long, he found that he was able to get a decent amount of speed on.

Whilst he was writing he often looked up and looked at the people around him. He often looked in the direction of Steve and Natasha. He could see that they had their heads down and were typing furiously. Natasha was a touch typist, and was going so fast that the writer was surprised that there wasn't any steam coming out of her laptop. Steve, on the other hand, was a two fingered typist, much like the writer himself, but, like the writer, he was still able to type quite quickly with those two fingers.

The writer found these two intriguing. He felt that there was something odd about them, something that was different. But he didn't feel that this difference was a bad thing, or something that was to be feared. He felt that there was an overwhelming sense of goodness emanating from them, and that there was nothing to fear from them. He didn't know why he felt this, but he did.

He went back to his novel, and continued typing away. He was at a curious part of his novel. It contained a couple of writers who were also taking part in NaNoWriMo, and who had decided to come to the same write-in that he was at now. These characters also met up with another writer, who also had characters in his novel who were doing NaNoWriMo and were attending this same write-in. He felt that things were all starting to get a little strange and metaphysical, but he felt that he would be able to get his head around it all.

The coffee shop had some Christmas music playing over its speakers. The writer felt that it was still a little early to be thinking about Christmas, but he still found the music calming and relaxing. He thought ahead towards the Christmas period, where he would be able to get a bit of a break from work. He would probably still be feeling really tired just before the Christmas break, and so the time off would probably come as a blessed relief. He would be able to have long lie ins, and then relax in front of the TV, as he caught up on some of his TV shows, watched a load of Christmas films, as well as a load of Christmas specials on the TV.

But that was all a long way off. Before all of that he still had the rest of November, and NaNoWriMo, to get through first. He thought ahead to the 30th, the day that he hoped to be reaching his 150,000 word target. He imagined how good it would feel if he were to actually hit it. He had told everyone, his family, his friends, his colleagues, that he was aiming for 150,000 words. He had even got people to sponsor him to do so. Last year his father had passed away, but, shortly before the end, he had been looked after by one of the local hospices in his area, and he was very grateful for the care that they gave his father and his family at that time. He now

wanted to give something back, and this was his way of doing so. He couldn't run a marathon for charity, but he could write a stupid amount of words in a month. The hospice had publicised his challenge on their website, and he had even arranged for a page about it to be added to the intranet at his office. So many people knew about his target, so many people were watching his word count grow and were asking him about how he was doing. They were all giving him support, telling him that he could do it. He didn't want to let them, or himself, down. He wanted to make sure that he did his very best to reach his target of 150,000 words, and he knew that, if he did, it would feel fantastic.

He got his head down, and continued to write.

At the end of the session, Steve and Natasha both checked how much they had managed to get written. Natasha had managed 1,752 words, whereas Steve had managed 1,267. 'Whoa,' he exclaimed, 'You sure can write quickly! How did you learn to type that fast?'

'Oh, it's years of practice. I've been writing stories for what seems like forever, and just got used to being able to type quickly.'

'If you can type that fast how come you managed to fall behind at all, even before the Dragon Keeper came along?'

'Well, whilst I can type quickly, I was having trouble with getting ideas for my story. I kept getting stuck for where it was going to go next, and so I ended up just crawling along. But today the ideas have just kept on flowing, it was like I couldn't stop! I think that you might have had something to do with that.' She smiled at him, and reached out and took his hand. 'How are you finding it?'

'Good, I'm making some progress with my story at last! I've almost covered a day's worth of words. If I can keep this up for the next two sessions, and maybe do some more tonight, I should have got today's lot of words done, and caught up on another two. And now that I won't be going back to the office I'll be able to get a lot more done during the week. I'll be back on target in no time'

The writer had been pleased with his progress. He had managed to do around 1,200 words. He couldn't be absolutely certain, as the word processor on his notebook counted the words differently than the one he used at home – his notebook's word processor was making his overall word count slightly higher, and it would only count the words that he had written in his entire document. It wasn't able to just count the words in the specific section that he had just written. But he could still tell that he had managed to do around 1,200 words, which was good.

If he could repeat that in the next two sessions then he would have 3,600 words from the session, leaving him with only another 1,400 to do once he got home, which, all things being well and if he could avoid distractions, he should be able to get done in about an hour or so.

During the break he decided to go up and speak to Steve and Natasha again. He went up to them and asked, 'How'd you two find that?'

'It was good, thanks,' said Natasha, 'We both got a lot done. How are you finding it?'

'It's going OK. Although I'm at a bit of an odd moment in my story. It has a couple of characters in it who are also taking part in NaNoWriMo. Each chapter of my novel takes place during an actual day, and in today's chapter they've both decided to come to a write-in, which funnily enough happens to take place at Costa Coffee at Waterstones in Piccadilly! They are actually here now, as we speak! Or maybe it's us who are in the novel, in which case -' He then looked up, and continued, 'Could I perhaps suggest a few plot changes, if that's OK with you? Some more money for me would be good for starters. And a job that doesn't tire me out all of the time. And a girlfriend would be nice too, I mean, come on, I'm nearly 30!'

Natasha smiled at this, 'Ah, don't worry. I'm sure your story will all work out fine in the end.'

Steve then said, 'Yeah, I don't think you're going to have anything to worry about.' Steve and Natasha then exchanged a look and a smile between them, for they had briefly shifted part of their awareness away, and had seen his future.

During the second session the writer once again ploughed on with his novel, but his mind kept wandering over towards Steve and Natasha. There really was something about them, something that was different, something that was good. Something that he couldn't quite put his finger on. They intrigued him, and he wanted to know more about them.

At the end of the second session the writer decided to stay in his seat and rest for a bit. He was still feeling really tired. But he was starting to feel a little better. He felt confident that he was going to reach his word target for the day - he had added another 1,200 words during the latest stint, and there was still one more to go. He felt that he might continue writing on this laptop when he got home, and during the week as well. He wasn't able to connect it up to the web, and so, therefore, he didn't have as much to distract him.

But, right here and right now, he still had a little bit of a distraction, namely Steve and Natasha. He kept looking over towards them. Their happiness at being together was abundantly clear.

Steve was again happy with the amount of words that he had been able to write in that session. He had got another 1,467 done, he was speeding up. Natasha had slowed down a little, but she still managed to get another 1,654 words done.

She looked over towards the writer, who she could tell had been looking at them. She turned to Steve and said, 'That guy's been looking at us a lot today. You don't suppose he suspects something, do you?'

'Suspect what, exactly? It's not like we've done anything wrong. He's probably just thinks it's nice seeing us two together or something like that.'

'Yeah, I suppose so...' Natasha looked at the writer again, but she wasn't so sure. She felt that there was something different about him. Even with her newly found powers, she couldn't quite work out what it was.

During the third and final session the writer kept on with his novel, but he kept looking up at Steve and Natasha. But now, whenever he did so, something strange came over his vision. He couldn't quite explain it, but whenever he looked at them everything in his vision seemed to change colour. Everything seemed to be tinted a reddish colour.

By the end of the third session both Steve and Natasha were pleased with the progress that they had made. Steve had added a further 1,576 words, and Natasha had added a further 1,726. It had been a very productive first write-in for both of them. NaNoWriMo now felt much more winnable for both of them.

The writer, too, had had a very productive write-in. Overall, by the end of it he had reached the 69k mark. All he would need to do once he got home was write another 1,000 words, and then it was just a question of going over what he had written, and then uploading the latest chapter to his website. He would even have enough time to watch a little TV and then get to bed at a reasonable hour. And, if he was really lucky, he wouldn't be feeling exhausted when he went back to work tomorrow.

As everyone was starting to pack up to leave, he went back over to Steve and Natasha, his field of vision once again being tinted red. He asked them, 'So, did you enjoy your first write in?'

Natasha answered, 'Yeah, it was good, thanks. I've got a lot done. I actually have a chance of winning this thing now!'

Steve then added, 'It went well for me too. I still have a bit of a mountain to climb, but now that mountain is a little smaller.'

Natasha asked, 'How did you do?'

The writer answered, 'I've made it up to 69k, so just a little bit more to do at home today and then I've reached my target for now. No matter what happens in the rest of the month I'll still be able to say that I wrote 70,000 words in 14 days.'

Steve said, 'That is indeed impressive. Insane, but still impressive!'

The writer then said, 'Well, good luck for the rest of Nano. I'll maybe see you again at another write-in?'

Natasha said, 'Yeah, hopefully. Good luck with yours, you crazy person!'

'Cheers, see you later!' The writer then went to say goodbye to some of his other friends before making his way home.

After he had left them Natasha asked Steve, 'Do you think there's something strange about him?'

'Of course there is! He's trying to write 150,000 words in a month. I think that definitely qualifies him as strange.'

'No, it's not just that, there's something else. I'm not quite sure what it is. He doesn't appear to be other-worldly, like Lisa and Naomi are. But I keep getting a feeling that there's something different about him, something that doesn't quite add up. And it seems important somehow. I'm not sure how, but it does.'

'Well then, why don't we have a look?' They shifted their awareness once more, this time taking it to the writer, and looking through his history and his future. But they couldn't see anything out of the ordinary. No being from beyond the Earth had ever dealt with him. He didn't harbour any secret plans to take over the world. There was nothing about him at all that made him stand out from everyone else. Although now Steve began to get the same feeling that Natasha had. That there was something else that was different about him, something that they just couldn't see.

They returned to where they were. Steve said, 'I see what you mean. I think we should probably mention it to Lisa when we see her next. But it's probably nothing.'

'Yeah, we'll do that.'

They then started to pack up their things, said goodbye to a few of the other people that they recognised from the kick-off party, and then they made their way home.

Like Steve and Natasha, the writer also lived in Harrow. He was making his way back on a Bakerloo Line train. It was slower than the trains that he used to get to and from work, but he wasn't overly concerned about that. He was still feeling very tired, and so he was glad of a chance

to sit down and rest for a while.

He thought of Steve and Natasha. He couldn't quite work out what it was about them that made them seem a little odd. It wasn't just the fact that they were a new couple that were still head over heels in love with each other. It was something else, something that he could quite see or put his finger on. But he had a very strong feeling that it was there, whatever it was. Plus there was the fact that his vision always ended up being tinted red whenever he looked at them.

As he was travelling home an image came into his head. He didn't know where it had come from, he was only certain that he hadn't placed it there himself. Whilst his eyes were starting to droop from his tiredness, he also knew that he wasn't asleep and that he wasn't dreaming. He felt certain that, somehow, this image was being sent to his head from somewhere beyond, although he had no idea who was doing this or how they were doing it.

In the image he saw Steve and Natasha standing on a hill overlooking Harrow.

And Harrow was burning.

Back at the write in there had been another figure that was taking an interest in Steve and Natasha. He sat in the corner and was largely unnoticed by everyone. He had a laptop with him and he blended into the crowd. He wrote during the writing sessions, and he took breaks during the break sessions. He bought coffee and cake, and didn't look in the slightest bit out of place. Only, dear reader, he was very much out of place. Even I am unable to quite determine who he is and where he comes from. And if I am unable to do that then that means that he is almost certainly not of your world. And if that is the case, and he is looking at Steve and Natasha, the keys to the power that your world contains, then that worries me. That worries me a lot.

When Steve and Natasha left the write-in he followed after them for a little bit, but then he left them at the entrance to Piccadilly Circus station. He had a look of satisfaction on his face.

Dear reader, that look worries me no end...