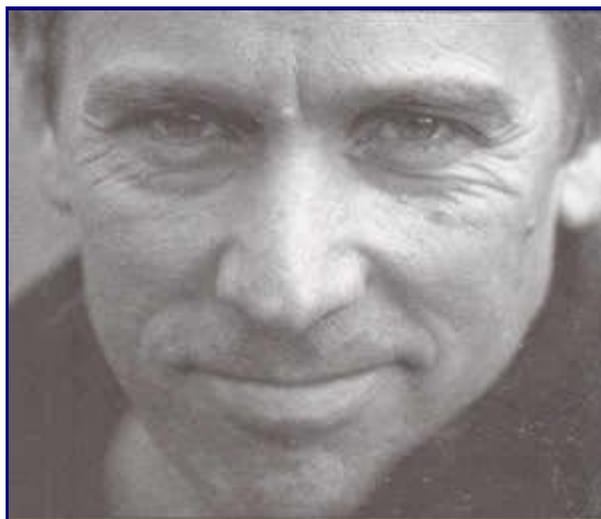


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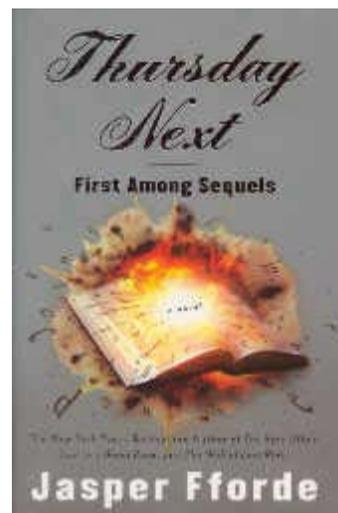


A READER'S JOURNAL

First Among Sequels
A Thursday Next Novel No. 5
by
Jasper Fforde

Published by The Penguin Group/NY in 2007
Book Review by Bobby Matherne ©2007

This is the first one of the five novels that I have read in hardback, so it's been a couple of years since I read that last one. By the time I had finished the



series of the already published, I was hooked on Fforde's ultra-Ffunny mode of writing about literary classics through the adventures of the Literary Detective Thursday Next, whose penchant for traveling in and out of fictional works is well-known in the fictional world, if not the real world, up until now. For anyone who thinks that life is too short to be serious and who has dabbled in the classics, Fforde is a God-send. He combines the logical clarity of Douglas Hofstadter (*Godel, Escher, and Bach*), the humor of Douglas Adams ([Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy](#)), and the satiric swipes at modern culture of G. K. Chesterton ([The Man Who Was Thursday](#)).

There is another plus which any writer or wannabe writer of fiction will quickly recognize: Fforde is constantly describing the structure of fiction: how the author creates a real world out of words. As Thursday walks around and interacts with fictional worlds, we become aware of the limits of the fictional world, such as the few kinds of trees in the forest, maybe only a handful, since only those trees exist which the author has chosen to describe. We learn how much fuller the Outland (the real world) is compared to the BookWorld of fiction.

We have in the Outland today, e. g., a surplus of hydrocarbon emissions, and a treaty designed to stem those emissions which allows countries with a surplus of emissions to "sell" their surplus to underdeveloped countries which have a deficit of such emissions so that the developed countries may continue to pump out their surplus. Fforde attacks this issue obliquely by covering the issue of a "stupidity surplus" in Thursday's time in England. The first sentence of the book introduces the subject:

[page 1] The dangerously high level of the stupidity surplus was once again the lead story in *The Owl* that morning.

The skinny is that present government has been "discharging their duties with a reckless degree of responsibility that bordered on inspired sagacity." In other words, by acting smart they had been building up the stupidity surplus.

[page 1] It was a state of affairs deplored by Mr. Alfredo Traficcone, leader of the opposition Prevailing Wind Party, who wanted to lead the nation back onto the safer grounds of uninformed stupidity.

Landen is talking to his wife Thursday as he reads the morning paper. Thursday is the narrator in this first person novel and she replies to his implied question.

[page 3] "But," Landen went on in a lather of outrage, "the prime minister has poured scorn on Traficcone's suggestion to offload our unwanted stupidity to Third World nations, who would be only too happy to have it in exchange for several sacks of cash and a Mercedes or two."

"He's right," I replied with a sigh. "Idiocy offsets are bullshit; stupidity is our own problem and has to be dealt with on an individual 'stupidity footprint' basis — and landfill *certainly* doesn't work."

Thursday was thinking of the sad affair⁽¹⁾ "in Cornwall where 20,000 tons of half-wittedness was buried in the sixties, only to percolate to the surface two decades later when the residents began doing inexplicably dumb things, such as using an electric mixer in the bath and parting their hair in the center." (Page 3)

Meanwhile, Thursday and Landen's son, Friday, is a teenager and her description of their sixteen-year-old son matches very closely that of Jeremy in the daily comic strip, *Zits*.

[page 4, 5] . . . he was a tedious teenage cliché — grunting, sighing at any request no matter how small and staying in bed until past midday, then slouching around the house in a state of semi-consciousness that would do credit to a career zombie. We might not have known he was living with us if it weren't for the grubby cereal bowls that mysteriously appeared in the vague vicinity of the sink, a muffled heavy metal beat from his bedroom that Landen was convinced kept the slugs from the garden and a succession of equally languid no-hopers who called at the door to mumble, "Is Friday at home?" — something that I couldn't resist answering with, "It's a matter of conjecture."

For those among you Good Readers who found nothing remotely funny in the quotations from the book so far, it would be best if you stop reading this review and pretend that you have never heard of Thursday Next. Or else you will be immediately confronted with trying to figure out why, when faced with the possibility of selling her household pet to the Swindon Dodo Fanciers for 30,000 pounds, Landen suggests the following way of using the money, "We could send Friday off to the Swindon Home for Dreary Teenagers." (Page 8) Or when Thursday muses on being two years older than fifty, she thinks, "All your life you think that the half century is death's adolescence, but actually it's really not that bad, as long as you can remember where you left your glasses." (Page 16)

Thursday is visting her mother and her Aunt Polly who love tea with Battenberg cake and driving the people crazy who ring their doorbells to do polls. Their measure of success is how long they can hold their victims in thrall before they turn and run away.

[page 17] The doorbell rang.

"Ooooh!" said Polly, peering furtively out the window. "What fun. It looks like a market researcher!"

"Right," said my mother in a very military tone. "Let's see how long we can keep him before he runs out screaming. I'll pretend to have mild dementia, and you can complain about your sciatica in German. We'll try to beat our personal Market-Researcher Containment record of two hours and twelve minutes."

I said that this book is the Book 5 in the Thursday Next series, but there is a fictional Book 5 "The Great Samuel Pepys Fiasco" which is listed in the Also By Jasper Fforde page preceding the Main Title Page. The Pepys book, however, is lined through and accompanied by this sub-text note in parentheses: (No longer available). Note the multiple levels of humor here. A book of fiction whose very existence is *fictional!* A list of Books Written By the Author which contains a book which is *not only* "No longer available" but *never was available!* — for the very good reason that the existence of the Pepys book 5 is a part of the plot and fictional structure of this book 5. If you have trouble getting your mind around this

concept, remember my earlier advice. But the fact of its non-existence in the real world is no reason to ignore the fictional existence of the Thursday Next character which would have inhabited Book 5, if it *had existed*, therefore Jasper Fforde creates the character, Thursday5, who quickly becomes Thursday's bumbling intern in this book, and also creates the character Thursday1-4, the Thursday from Books 1-4, who stars in this book as the nemesis of Thursday. Fforde, like the Red Queen in "Alice in Wonderland" must practice thinking of 13 impossible things by breakfast each morning.

Thursday5 was identical to Thursday, but with noticeable deviations in behavior and dress.

[page 37] She didn't act or dress like me; her clothes were more earthy and sustainable. Instead of my usual jeans, shirt and jacket, she wore a naturally dyed cotton skirt and a homespun crocheted pullover. She carried a shoulder bag of felt instead of my Billingham, and in place of the scarlet scrunchie holding my ponytail in place, her's was secured with a strip of hemp cloth tied in a neat bow. It wasn't by accident. After I had endured the wholly unwarranted aggression of the first four Thursday books, I'd insisted that the fifth reflect my more sensitive nature. Unfortunately, they took me a little too seriously, and Thursday5 was the result. She was sensitive, caring, compassionate, kind, thoughtful — and unreadable. *The Great Samuel Pepys Fiasco* sold so badly it was remaindered within six months and never made it to paperback, something I was secretly glad of.

As part of Thursday5's training, she accompanies Thursday into the austere world of Jane Austen, namely, Norland Park. In this next passage, you can read how Fforde explains how Book-World varies from Outland.

[page 47] We stepped outside the colonnaded entrance of Norland Park and basked in the warmth of the sunshine. The story had long ago departed with the Dashwood family to Devon, and this corner of *Sense and Sensibility* was quiet and unused. To one side a saddled horse was leaning languidly against a tree with a hound sitting on the ground quite near it. Birds sang in the branches, and clouds moved slowly across the heavens. Each cloud was identical, of course, and the sun didn't track across the sky as it did back home, and, come to think of it, the birdsong was on a twenty-second loop. It was what we called "narrative economics," the bare amount of description necessary to create a scene. The BookWorld was like that — mostly ordered, and without the rich texture that nature's randomness brings to the real world.

Here is the typical setting of a fictional book when there's no action going on. It's quiet like a sound stage that is not being used, but is all ready for the next scene to be filmed there. There's the horse, the dog, the birds singing, the clouds rolling by, all waiting for the chapter when the Austen characters walk out through the colonnaded entrance of Norland Park. Our two Thursdays are waiting for a taxi to arrive to take them to the Council of Genres, so they chat. Thursday asks Thursday5 if there is any aspect of BookWorld she'd like to visit and learn about during her internship.

[page 49] "Well," she said after a pause, "I'd like to have a go and see what it's like inside a story during a recitation in the oral tradition — I've heard it's really kind of buzzing."

She was right. It was like sweaty live improv theater — anything could happen.

"No way," I said, "and if I hear that you've been anywhere near OralTrad, you'll be confined to *The Great Samuel Pepys Fiasco*. It's not like books where everything's laid out and orderly. the oral tradition is *dynamic* like you've no idea. Change anything in there and you will, quite literally, give the narrator an aneurysm."

"A what?"

"A brain hemorrhage. The same can be said of Poetry. You don't want to go hacking around in there without a clear head on your shoulders."

"Why?"

"It's like a big emotion magnifier. All feelings are exacerbated to a dangerous level. You can find things about yourself that you never knew — or never wanted to know. We have a saying:

'You can lose yourself in a book, but you find yourself in Poetry.' It's like being able to see yourself when drunk."

Instead of OralTrad, Thursday takes her intern to the Great Library. She explains that the library was *not* any more real than BookWorld was. And it changed the way the contents of a book might change from reading to reading, from reader to reader.

[page 52] The library was as nebulous as the books it contained; its form was decided not only by the base description but my *interpretation* of what a Great Library might look like. Because of this the library was as subtly changeable as my moods. At times dark and somber, at others light and airy. Reading, I had learned, was as creative a process as writing, sometimes more so. When we read of the dying rays of the setting sun or the boom and swish of the incoming tide, we should reserve as much praise for ourselves as for the author. After all, the reader is doing all the work — the writer might have died long ago.

Agent Thursday Next is 00-qualified by Jurisfiction, licensed to kill, which in BookWorld means to reduce a person, place, or thing to text: scattered letters which enter the great Text Sea where they may be recycled. Here she is preparing her weapon which only works on BookWorld characters. She fills it with the writer's weapon of choice for erasing BookWorld characters: an eraserhead bullet!

[page 60] I slipped the cartridge in, snapped the pistol shut and put it back in my bag. The eraserhead was just one of the many abstract technologies that JurisTech built for us. Designed to sever the bonds between letters in a word, it was a devastating weapon to anyone of textual origin — a single blast from one of these and the unlucky recipient would be nothing but a jumbled heap of letters and a bluish haze. Its use is strictly controlled — Jurisfiction agents only.

One might wonder what it's like being inside a book when a reading occurs, and Jasper gives us that very description. Read this and imagine that someone is inside this book experiencing this as you are reading it. Or that you are inside the book as someone else is reading it. Caution: do not attempt this if you are reading while driving a car!

[page 67] There was a distant hum and a rumble as the reading approached. Then came a light buzz in the air like static and an increased heightening of the sense as the reader took up the descriptive power of the book and translated it into his or her own unique interpretation of the events — channeled from here through the massive imaginotransference Storycode Engines back at Text Grand Central and into the reader's imagination. It was a technology of almost incalculable complexity, which I had yet to fully understand. But the beauty of the whole process was that the reader in the Outland never suspected there was any sort of process at all — the act of reading was to most people, myself included, as natural as breathing.

But the effect inside BookWorld is phenomenal! When a reading takes place, the walls gain a texture provided by the imagination of the reader, the smells become distinct, the sounds may take on a musical quality — all the sensory experience is heightened during the reading process. Fasten your seatbelts as you experience a reading of Pinocchio. You are in Geppetto's workshop. Watch out! Here comes the reader!

[page 68] The walls, which up until then had been a blank wash of color, suddenly gained texture, a myriad of subtle hues and even areas of damp. The window frames peeled and dusted up, the floor moved and undulated until it was covered in flagstones

that even I, as an Outlander, would not be able to distinguish from real ones. As Pinocchio slept on, the reading suddenly swelled like a breaking ocean roller and crossed the room in front of us, a crest of heightened reality that moved through us and imparted a warm feeling of well-being. But more than that, a rare thing in fiction, a delicate potpourri of *smells*. Freshly cut wood, cooking, spice, damp — and Pinocchio's scorched legs — a strange jumble of faces, a young girl laughing and a derelict castle in the moonlight. The smells grew stronger, to the point where I could taste them in my mouth, the dust and grime in the room seemingly accentuated until there was a faint hiss and a *ploof* sound and the enchanted feelings dropped away in a instant. Everything once more returned to the limited reality we had experienced when we arrived — the bare description necessary for the room to be Geppetto's workshop.

Imagine that! You got a chance to experience being read! You can only imagine if after Jasper Fforde has created the experience for you on page 68 and after you have finished reading page 68. Now as you think about it, you will probably agree with me that the way you felt during your reading of page 68 passage was much stronger! As a book reader since I was five or so, I must say that the author captures my experiences of reading over the years and brings it to life. No movie or television show can offer the equivalent experience of a first-person reading because the verisimilitude one can achieve when reading at one's own pace as one fills out the scene, like Fforde did of Geppetto's workshop, can never be reached when one is subjected to the pace chosen by a director. Great directors can get close to one's own pace of experience, but they provide only one pace, one size of shoes to fit all — some sizes will pinch and others will flop on one's feet. Reading, on the other hand, is full of personal experience and the author's shoes always fit!

But enough about how Outlanders experience BookWorld, what about how BookWorlders experience Outland? Fforde gives us an example and an explanation. Thursday5 slips up and reveals that Thursday, standing next to her in front of two guards, is an Outlander. The guards are delighted. His question of Thursday Next remind me of the title of Philip K. Dick's novel upon which the movie "Blade Runner" was based, "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?"

[page 89, 90] "What an honor!" said the first guard. "Someone from the *real* world." He thought for a moment. "Tell me, if it rains on a really hot day, do sheep shrink?"

"Is that a security question?"

"No, no," replied the guard quickly. "Bert and I were just discussing it recently."

This wasn't unusual. Characters in fiction had a very awkward view of the real world. To them the extreme elements of human experience were commonplace, as they were generally the sorts of issues that made it into books, which left the mundanities of real life somewhat obscure and mysterious. Ask a resident of the BookWorld about terminal diseases, loss, gunshot trajectories, dramatic irony and problematic relatives and he'd be more experienced than you or me — quiz him on paintbrushes and he'd spend the rest of the week trying to figure out how the paint stays on the bristles until it touches another surface.

Wanting to help her husband Landen who was working on his magnum opus which was more "magnum than opus" according to him, Thursday wandered into a retail store in the well of lost plots hoping to buy a useful plot device to carry back to her beleaguered husband. Here are three that she discusses with Murray the shopkeeper.

[page 100] "How about a *Suddenly a shot rang out?* That always a safe bet for mysteries or to get you out of a scrape when you don't know what to do next."

"I think I can afford something better than that. Got anything a bit more . . . complex?"

Murray looked at the labels on the drawers again. "I've got a *And that, said Mr. Whimple, was when we discovered . . . the truth.*"

"Too vague."

Perhaps, but it's cheap. Okay. How about a *Mysterious stranger arriving during a thunderstorm*? We've got a special on this week. Take the stranger and you can have a corrupt local chief of police and an escaped homicidal lunatic at no extra charge."

Things get a little dicey at the registration desk of ChronoGuard whose staff take going back and forth in time as par for the course of their jobs. But they need to watch out for their presuppositions or they will slip some important information, violating in effect the Temporal Prime Directive as it is called in Star Trek: Voyager episodes. The gal at the registration does this when she meets Friday Next for the first time. Note the presence of the phrase " a bit previous" in the exchange. Only in the presence of time travel technology can such an expression make sense.

[page 116] "Mr. Next — Friday — how do you do? I've wanted to meet you again for the first time. May I shake you by the hand and congratulate you on — "

She stopped, realized he was being a bit previous and making a fool of herself, so coughed in an embarrassed manner before smoothing her skirt absently and sitting down again.

Thursday's grandfather was a time operative as we discovered in the first sentence of the first novel, "He had a face that could stop a clock." Literally, time would stop whenever her father showed his face to Thursday. In the end, his existence was wiped out. Imagine his tombstone which might have read, "NEXT RIP: Never Existed" Thursday tries to justify Friday's joining the ChronoGuard.

[page 116] "Because your grandfather was a time operative."

"Yeah," he grunted, "and look what happened to him."

Landen and I exchanged glances. Friday was right. Ending up not having existed wasn't a terrific end to a promising career."

But you must admit listening to a ChronoGuard time operative talk has its interesting moments, such as when Captain Bendix tries to wow Friday with his prospects as a time operative:

[page 117] "As I'm about to say, did say or would say, my name is Bendix Scintilla, and I was died on March sixteenth, 3291. I'm twenty-three years old in my own personal time, seven hundred and twenty-six in my elapsed work time, and you meet me twenty-seven percent through my life."

The anti-missile defense shield is poked fun at in this next passage where it appears as the costly Anti-Smite Shield project. It is, of course, as any Bible reader can attest, intended to deflect any attempt by an enraged deity to smite someone who has been evil.

[page 138] The news on the radio that morning was devoted — once again — to the ongoing crisis of the week — namely, where the nation's stupidity surplus could be discharged safely. Some suggested a small war in a distant country against a race of people we weren't generally disposed toward, but other thought this too risky and favored crippling the efficiency of the public services by adding a new layer of bureaucracy at huge expense and little benefit. Not all suggestions were sensible: Fringe elements of the debate maintained that the nation should revitalize the stupendously costly Anti-Smite Shield project. Designed to protect mankind — or at least England — against the potential threat by an enraged deity eager to cleanse a sinful race with a rain of fire, the shield project would have the twin benefits of profligate waste of good cash plus the possibility that other European nations could be persuaded to join and thus deal with Europes' combined stupidity excess in one fell swoop.

Imprisonment in BookWorld in a time loop seemed to be the method du jour during Next's time. She needs information

from her earlier arch-enemy Aornis Hades who's stuck in line waiting to pay for her stockings at the T. J. Maxx discount clothing store. As soon as she gets close to checking out, time skips back until she is the eleventh one in line once again. This is an ingenious scheme which Fforde has concocted, one that Hatlo would have loved and attempted to use in *The Hatlo's Inferno* comic series back in the 1940s and 50s if he'd thought of it back then. Here's Fforde's description of how the loop works:



[page 145] They called being "in the loop," but the official name was Closed Loop Temporal Field Containment. It was used only for criminals where there was little hope of rehabilitation, or even contrition. It was run by the ChronoGuard and was frighteningly simple. They popped the convict in an eight-minute repetitive time loop for five, ten, twenty years. The prisoner's body aged but never needed sustenance. It was cruel and unnatural — yet cheap and required no bars, guards, or food.

[page 147] "They're not prisoners — just real shoppers doing real shopping at the time of her enloopment; Miss Hades is stuck in an eight-minute zone waiting to pay for goods, but she never does. If it's true what they say about her love of shopping, this punishment is *particularly apt*."

We listen to Thursday question Aornis and watch her as her time loop skips backward:

[page 148] She took a deep breath as the loop jumped back to the beginning of her eight minutes and she was once more in the rear of her line. She clenched her fists so tightly her knuckles went white. She'd been doing this for ten years without respite.

But nothing is as loopy as when Thursday own son, Friday, shows up from the future, all clean-shaved and nattily dressed and suggests that he replace the slovenly slug who decorates her sofa at home.

[page 151] "Let me get this straight," I said. "You want to murder my son and replace him with yourself? I only met you minutes ago."

"I'm your son, Mum. Every memory, good or bad is as much a part of me as it is the Friday at home. You want me to prove it? Who else knows about the BookWorld? One of your best friends is Melanie Bradshaw, who's a gorilla. It's true she let me climb all over the furniture and swing from the light fixtures. I can speak Courier Bold and Lorem Ipsum and even unpeel a banana with my feet — want me to show you?"

Ah, but nothing is better than the free-for-fights which take place at the Annual BookWorld Conferences. No matter how tight security is, well, read for yourself:

[page 167] BookCon was the sort of event that was too large and too varied to keep all factions happy, and the previous year's decision to lift the restrictions on Abstract Concepts attending as delegates opened the floodgates to a multitude of Literary Theories and Grammatical Conventions who spent most of the time pontificating loftily

and causing trouble in the bar, where fights broke out at the drop of a principle. When Poststructuralism got in a fight with Classicism, there were all banned, something that upset the Subjunctives no end, who complained bitterly that if *they* had been fighting, they would have won.

A quick read of this next Next passage should explain one of the meanings of the title of this book — how it came to be called the "First Among Sequels".

[page 174] Thursday5 was mostly thought with very little action; Thursday1-4 was mostly action with very little thought. The series sacrificed characterization for plot, and humor for action and pace.

Emperor's get no respect. Here's Thursday chatting with Emperor Zhark from the genre of bad science-fiction novels.

[page 212] "Hi, Emperor. How's the galactic domination business these days?"
"Hard work," he replied, rolling his eyes heavenward. "Honestly, I invade peaceful civilizations on a whim, destroy their cities and generally cause a great deal of unhappy mayhem — then they turn against me for absolutely no reason at all."
"How senselessly irrational of them," I remarked.

At one point, Emperor Zhark, after sharing his thought that slaughtering peaceful civilizations on a whim could be a lot more fun with someone to do it with, approaches the hedgehog, Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle.

[page 215, 216] "Hello," said Zhark, sizing her up for matrimony as he shook her hand. "How would you like the power of life or death over a billion godless heathens?"
She paused for a moment and raised an eyebrow. "Montreal suits me just fine."

It's rare to read an author casting a judgment in one book upon another book of his, but Jasper Fforde's on to cross the river when he comes to it. And yet when Thursday enters [The Eyre Affair](#), the first among the sequels, chronologically if not eponymically speaking, she reflects on the structure of the novel in which her husband-to-be Landon kept disappearing from most of the action.

[page 221] The legal necessity of removing Landen from the series was actually a blessing in disguise for the publishers. It freed up their Thursday romantically and also gave a reason for her psychotic personality. Boy, was this book ever *crap*.

When she confronts Thursday1-4, Thursday explains that she was sent from Text Grand Central because of some wrinkles showing up in the narrative. Here's the reply she receives, which indicates perhaps some injectors had gotten some rust building up on them.

[page 221] "It's okay," she said, "everything's fine. It's probably a Storycode Engine on the fritz. A buildup of irony on the dialogue injectors or something."

Everybody's getting into physics these days, which can be upsetting to real physicists like myself, but it's okay, I figure, for them to do so if they make me laugh. Like Fforde's explication of *Schrödinger's Night Fever* Principle and his accurate re-statement of the Second Law of Thermodynamics. I kept wishing for Mycroft's recipe for unscrambling eggs, but the book ended before Thursday got around to it. Her son, Friday, awakens from his teenage stupor to explain the *SNF* Principle to Thursday.

[page 262] "Many things happen solely because of the curious human foible of a preconceived notion's altering the outcome. More simply put: If we convince ourselves that something is possible, it becomes so. It's called the *Schrödinger's Night Fever* Principle."
"I don't understand."

"It's simple. If you go to see *Saturday Night Fever* expecting it to be good, it's a corker. However, if you go expecting it to be a crock of shit, it's that, to. Thus *Saturday Night Fever* exist in two mutually opposing states *at the very same time*, yet only by the weight of our expectations.

And the Second Law is even simpler to state, "You can put a pig in a machine to make a sausage, but you can't put a sausage in a machine to make a pig." Friday asks his mother if she'd noticed that short-attention spans have become the rule of the day. She admits, "No one's reading books anymore. They seem to prefer the mind-numbing spectacle of easily digested trash TV and celebrity tittle-tattle." (Page 264) Friday explains how the time engines of ChronoGuard get their energy by stealing from time and that is causing a shorter and shorter *Now*. Could things get worse than they are today?

[page 265] "*Much worse,*" replied Friday. "*At the rate the Now is being eroded, by this time next year Samaritan Kidney Swap will be considered the height of scholarly erudition. But easily digestible TV is not the cause — it's the effect. A Short Now will also spell the gradual collapse of forward planning, and mankind will slowly strangulate itself in a downward spiral of uncaring self-interest and short-term gratification.*"

In other words, we are plunging into the world facetiously splashed across the screen in the Luke Wilson 2005 movie, [Idiocracy](#). (See footnote 1 above.) A future world in which the most average person today would be considered the smartest person in the world and would be asked to solve such difficult problems as why all the crops are dying when they are sprinkled with Gator-Ade instead of water.

One of Thursday's burdens is her teenage daughter, Jenny, who doesn't exist. Jenny was only a memory created in Thursday's head by Aornis for revenge. Landen, his daughter Tuesday, and his son, Friday, have given up trying to explain to Thursday that Jenny doesn't exist, but it's not until page 269 of the book that we and Thursday discover the truth. Jenny is always doing something off-screen (in BookWorld terms), a sleep-over or something, up until now. We learn the truth, as does Thursday, but she will shortly forget it as Aornis' spell restores the false memory she implanted. Jenny is not high maintenance in terms of food, clothes, and car rides, but she makes up for it in the amount of air time it takes Thursday to find out what's going on with Jenny on any given day.

[page 269] It was only as we were driving home that I suddenly thought of Jenny.

"Oh, my God!" I said in a panic. "We left Jenny at home on her own!"

Landen took hold of my arm and squeezed it a bit, and I felt Friday rest his hand on my shoulder.

"It's all right, darling, calm down," Landen soothed. "We left her with Mrs. Berko-Boyler."

I frowned. "No, we *didn't*. You said she was making a camp in the attic. We came straight out. How could we have forgotten?"

"Sweetheart," said Landen with a deep breath, "there is no Jenny."

"What do you mean?" I demanded, chuckling at the stupidity of his comment. "Of course there's a Jenny!"

"Dad's right," said Friday soothingly. "There has never been a Jenny."

"But I can *remember* her!"

"It's *Aornis*, Mum," added Tuesday. "She gave you this mindworm seven years ago, and we can't get rid of it."

In Chapter 32, Thursday goes off roving in a Jane Austen novel using a vehicle that is appropriately called an Austen Rover. She was introduced to the Rover by a Doctor Anne Wirthlass(2), who explained all the complexities of the Austen Rover. Soon Fforde introduces some physics into his novel, this time in form of BookWorld "dark reading matter", an obvious swipe at the so-called dark matter which fills the Outland Universe. Obviously Phforde is haphing phun with physics again.

[page 282] "The Nothing is a big place," I said without fear of understatement, "and mostly empty. Theoretical storyologists have calculated that the readable BookWorld makes up only twenty-two percent of visible reading matter — the remainder is the unobservable remnants of long-lot books, forgotten oral traditions and ideas still locked in writers' head. We call it 'dark reading matter'."

Thursday has more adventures ahead of her the Wirthless-Schitt dispatches her onto the fictional steamship *Moral Dilemma* as its captain. They are lost on an endless ocean with an endless stream of eponymous crises to be faced by Captain Thursday Next, and the only port anywhere is Port Conjecture. After facing challenge after challenge of whom to save and whom to let die, she finally turns to her First Mate and asks a question whose answer is horrifying.

[page 301] "Fitzwilliam," I demanded, "where is this damnable place?"

He took a deep breath and lowered his voice. "We're oral tradition, but we're not in a story — we're an *ethics seminar*."

"You mean you're all hypothetical characters during a lecture?"

Fitzwilliams nodded miserably.

Remember back before passage [page 49] when the two Thursdays had called for a taxi to take them to the Council of Genres? Well, they gave up on the taxi eventually, but lo, and behold! here on page 307, just in the nick of time, the taxi appears to pick up her just before she is swept away by a rainstorm of text.

Well, Thursday makes it back to Text Grand Central only to find that she had been replaced by Thursday1-4, her evil nemesis, who had thrown off her black leather garb and was dressed exactly like our Thursday. They race to get to the boss first, but they run equally fast, they stop and fight and each one knows all the other's tricks. Finally our Thursday is standing triumphantly over the evil twin. This is a first person narrative and in the very next scene, we discover that the evil twin has taken over the narration in the book! And our Thursday has been sent off forever to "The Great Samuel Pepys Fiasco".

Can our heroine ever recover her rightful place as Landen's wife and mother to two real children and one imaginary one? Will Friday become half the ChronoGuard agent that his grandfather was? Will Landen ever finish his great British novel? Will Jenny ever come down from her camp in the attic? Will Aornis ever get to pay for her stockings at T. J. Maxx? Will the stupidity surplus be discharged by building the Anti-Smite Shield? Will Felix8 ever get out of the Weirdshitorium? Will Fforde ever run out of things to poke Ffun at? All we can say in parting is: What Next?

----- *Footnotes* -----

Footnote 1. A landfill features prominently in the 2005 movie [Idiocracy](#) in which a huge garbage dump collapses and everyone is so stupid that an average American from 500 years earlier (today) arrives and is proclaimed the "Smartest Man in the World". In this very funny movie, idiocy is institutionalized and rampant everywhere in the world. No country has a stupidity surplus!

[Return to text directly before Footnote 1.](#)

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**Footnote 2.** We find out on page 289 that she is actually married to someone we've met before, so we should all know Jack Schitt. That would make Anne's married name, A. Wirthless Schitt, and she lives up to that name, right up to the point she dies a heroine saving a little girl's life on page 314.

[Return to text directly before Footnote 2.](#)

