

Writing through the Smartlink's Cracks

The year is 2113. On the island of Malta lived a simple man named Jack Sullivan. At first glance he seems quite ordinary: a 57 year old journalist, married to Mary, a paediatric doctor, for 31 years, with three adult children, Sophia, Luna and Archie. But Jack was about to embark on an adventure that would shake the foundations of what his world had become - and it began, as many great adventures do, quite by happenstance.

We had long since outsourced the storing and organising of our memories and complex intellectual labour to our smartlinks. What began as a mobile phone almost a century and a half ago slowly sunk its roots deeper into our lives. After it had evolved as the smartphone to engulf the alarm clock, camera, TV, mp3 player, gaming device, internet device, when AI continued to develop in the early 21st century it engulfed it too in its pocket-sized form. And so the device grew ever more subtle, and ever more powerful. The smartlink granted us dominion over all information while binding us ever more tightly to the algorithms in our pockets. While most of humanity was suspicious of having AI chips implanted, the smartlink never needed to breach our skin to colonise our minds - it simply made itself seemingly indispensable.

In the 60's everyone ended up shifting to the smartlink, what choice did we have? Who would want to be left behind? And yet no one really noticed - or those that did, didn't make enough fuss about it - that as smartlinks got more powerful other things faded away. What things you might ask? I would tell you, but I can't remember what I don't know, and since I don't know, I'm sure it's not that important anyway.

Where were we? Ah yes! Jack the journalist in Malta, and where shall we begin? Monday seems like a good day to start, Monday 27th February.

That morning was much like any other in Msida. Jack's smartlink rang at 6:30am, and the Sullivans began their morning routine. Mary rushed off as her hospital rounds started at 8:00am, wanting to review what her student doctors chose to read and upload to their smartlinks over the weekend. Jack got ready, ate breakfast, reviewed a summary of the news prepared for him and was on his way to the office. As senior editor and feature writer, at The Malta Observer, he would curate articles through the knowledge stored in his smartlink, verify sources, and approve the final output.

Nowadays, "thought-shares" made direct exchanges of information through smartlinks more efficient. What once required conversation, careful selection of words, navigating the uncertainty of being understood, was a thing of the past. Now it could all be transmitted with clarity through smartlinks, with users choosing and curating what's shared.

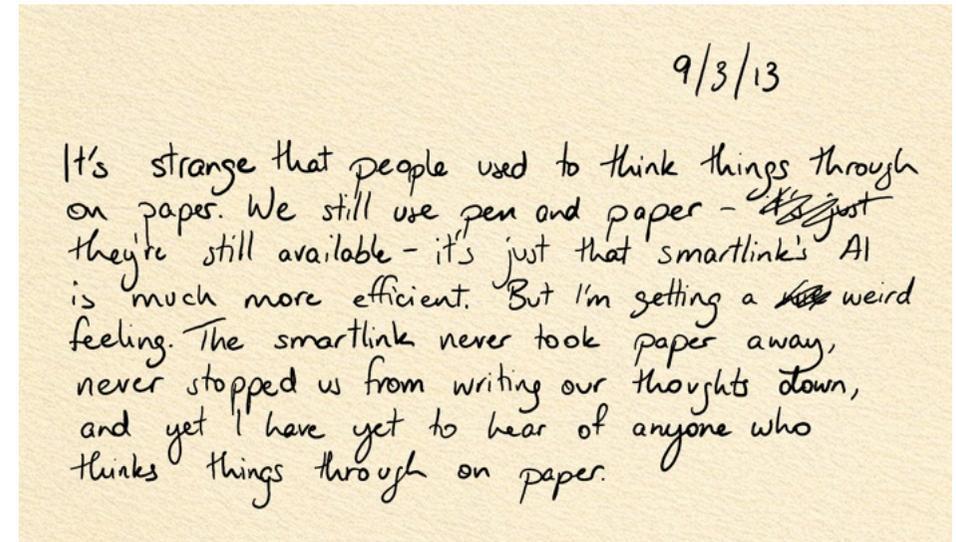
As Jack went through his day, his smartlink kept his thoughts organised, but his mind was preoccupied because he had to get his dad, Ralph, to an elderly care home the following day. At 83, Ralph's body had begun to fail him, though his mind remained sharp.

Later that week, sorting through his dad's things, Jack stumbled upon a notebook that belonged to his grandmother Alice, who had passed away in the 80's. It was full of her thoughts and musings arranged in a chaotic dance of arrows, circles, and underlining - then he noticed the year: 2064. It was from the

earlier days, before the intelligence revolution really took hold - it must have been before she set-up her smartlink. Seeing many blank pages remaining made him curious, but he had other things to catch up on so he just threw it in his bag, took a quick photo scan of the rooms, and smartlink quickly made an inventory of what his dad had left.

The following days continued as normal with these thoughts left to sediment in his mind. The shape of work had shifted since the intelligence revolution. While labour jobs maintained the 40hr weeks, white collar workers found their schedules altered by smartlink integration. Manual labourers had smartlinks too, but everyone bought one according to their means and their needs. Journalists like Jack worked 20 hours, with an additional 10 hours of required weekly training where they could update their smartlink knowledge bases and fine-tune their professional capabilities. Medical professionals like Mary still worked 40hr weeks, but smartlinks transformed their practice - AI handled all administrative duties allowing doctors to focus on patient care. The standardised 9-5 became a spectrum of schedules, each optimised for its sector's blend of human input and smartlink-AI augmentation.

The following Thursday, Jack had some time to start reading the notebook, but a strange feeling came over him - "Since it was written before smartlink, maybe it would be more respectful to grandma Alice to keep it that way." So he left his smartlink in a different room. As he read he felt captivated and wanted to remember these things, but since he didn't have his smartlink with him, he decided that he could put his thoughts down on the blank pages of the notebook.



That weekend, Jack and Mary had some time to themselves and as they sat in their balcony, Jack brought out the notebook.

"I've been thinking," he said as he drew closer to Mary to show her. "I wrote some things down in the notebook, and it felt a bit different."

"Different good, or different bad?"

"I don't know... different. Have you ever tried writing down your thoughts? Thinking them through on paper?"

"Why go through all that hassle when smartlink captures, processes and organises everything so perfectly? I don't have time for that, I'd rather spend time doing things I enjoy." She replied.

"I wonder if I'll enjoy it..."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know, I need to think about this a bit more..." They sat there silently in each other's arms, thinking, as the sun was setting.

On Tuesday, for the third night in two weeks, Jack woke with his mind full of strange experiences - they felt real, yet weren't recorded in smartlink. He lay there, struggling to find words for these episodes where his consciousness seemed to drift to alternate realities while sleeping. "Mary," he whispered to his wife, who was already awake and reviewing patient files. "Something strange keeps happening when I'm asleep. It's like... I'm awake, alive, still experiencing things, but everything's different."

"Different how?" she asked, setting her smartlink aside. As Jack tried to explain he could see her getting more confused. "No," she said slowly, "I've never experienced anything like that. But Jack, you've been sleeping up to 7 hours lately - that's 2 hours more than what people normally sleep, more than what's recommended." Jack tried to describe it again but the words felt clumsy, inadequate, like trying to describe colour to someone who had never seen it, and both grew a little frustrated.

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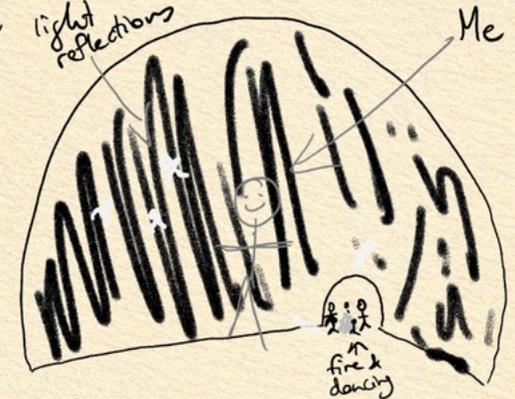
Last night it happened again! These... disruptions? They're becoming more frequent. Last night I ~~the~~ flew all over the island.

There must be some word for them, or I have to find one.



The night before was even stranger, I was in a dark tunnel, watching shadows dance on a wall. At first I

thought they were some sort of new hologram tech ~~that~~ but then I turned round and saw people dancing round a fire and making shadows with their hands, so I ran towards them, out of the tunnel. When I checked my smartlink data, I couldn't find anything about these specific experiences I've had recently stored there... I guess



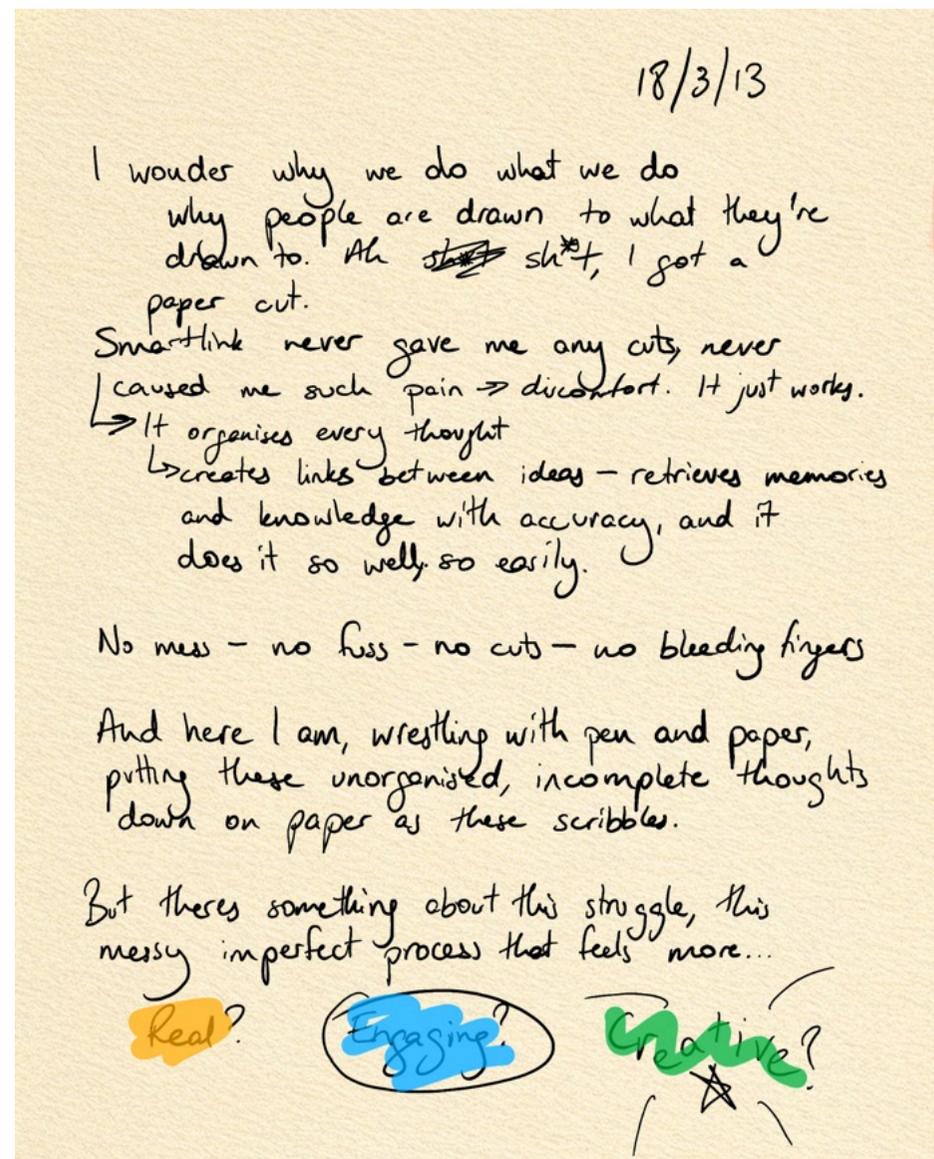
I should be concerned? These disruptive visions serve no clear purpose, but I think I enjoy them. And I woke up feeling rested, even maybe more refreshed, awakened?

Over the coming days, Jack found himself doing something peculiar - reading on topics that had nothing to do with his work assignments or training, learning about Maltese history, without storing these in his smartlink for processing. He stumbled upon historical records about Daphne Caruana Galizia, a journalist murdered in 2017 for exposing corruption. His smartlink kept prompting him to return to his assigned research about sustainable tourism, or if he wanted it to store and process what he was reading, but he dismissed the notifications.

During his next editorial meeting, his colleagues were confused when he put forward a feature piece connecting historical patterns of corruption to contemporary power structures. "Jack," his deputy editor said, glancing at her smartlink metrics, "the algorithms show that corruption exposés don't drive engagement." She paused, because something seemed different. "Are you sure this story suggestion came from your smartlink's training module for this week?" Jack couldn't explain that it hadn't - that he'd been reading simply because something in him needed to understand how journalism had once been more than optimised engagement and curated content delivered to people's smartlinks.

On Friday Jack went to see his dad, and shared about his recent experiences with how unstructured and messy his thoughts have become, how he's being drawn to learn about things that don't fit in with his weekly training or smartlink structured learning plan - and all this made him feel a little lost. "Your grandma Alice," Ralph began to reminisce, "used to say that learning wasn't about building a collection of facts. It was about being disturbed by new ideas, being challenged by different ways of thinking." He paused, fiddling with his

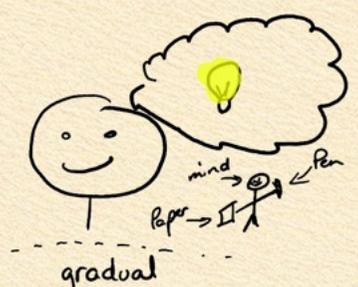
smartlink in his hand. "But I remember the time before the intelligence revolution, and it wasn't all that great. It's true that learning is more industry oriented nowadays, but it's not like learning and education wasn't tailored towards industry in the 40's and 50's. At least now we can learn what we need for work, without wasting time, and still have energy left for other things." Jack was still a little lost in his thoughts.



On Tuesday 21st March, Jack sat at his desk at the Malta Observer, staring at an article he was preparing on the intelligence revolution. His smartlink had prepared the first draft based on Jack's curated readings but then...

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If I were around during the intelligence revolution, I would have done it differently. Or at least I hope I would have.



gradual

But that's the thing about slow changes - they're subtle, invisible almost. We've been learning through our smartlinks because that's the most 'efficient' (?) way to learn. But what's the point? ~~I want~~ I want to learn, I want to write, because I can - not because I have to learn, not because I have to accumulate information, not because an algorithm decides that this is the most efficient way to learn - for what?! I want to create something that is my own! that feels like my own!



The smartlink never forced it's way in; it just made itself necessary, one small convenience at a time. That's what we need to be careful of -

the changes that happen slowly. They slip past our defences, reshape our minds, the way we think and learn, without triggering any questions. By the time we notice, we've already forgotten what we've lost, or worse, forgotten that ~~what~~ we've forgotten.



Open your eyes to notice the gradual changes: the future isn't fixed, it's in our hands. The way we learn, what we can choose to learn makes a difference because it's part of who we are, and who we choose to become... the future we choose to create!

P.S. Like did you notice how the font weight gradually changed as the story developed?

