

Fantasies

Fantasies come in all shapes and sizes. They range from a fleeting fancy for some improbable scenario - to a meticulously constructed (and habitually revisited) daydream. In a fantasy like *that*, there will be a series of carefully crafted events, culminating in enjoying the object of desire. There is that moment of exquisite consummation....usually followed by a wistful sigh: it was, after all, only a dream.

One of my favourite fantasies involves eggs and bacon. Perhaps I lack imagination, or maybe I'm just getting old. But as befits the genre of meticulous fantasies - this is not just some plate of runny eggs and flaccid bacon, served up by 'Fag-ash Lil' in the local 'Greasy Spoon'. Oh no. For one thing, this breakfast is cooked on a shovel.

Specifically, it is cooked on a coal-shovel, in the firebox of a class A4 locomotive. The loco is thundering up an incline, straining like a leashed beast. At 90 mph, every joint and rivet creaks and groans, the silver wheels are squealing in protest....and the pistons hammer out their merciless beat. On the footplate, the air is thick with steam and smoke and smuts. Luminescent coal glows white and orange in the open firebox - and radiant light floods out, dancing on the brass pipes.

Outside, the countryside rushes by - now vaguely discernable, as the soft, grey light of dawn gently begins to overpower the night. But there is an even more subtle struggle on the footplate: I find myself succumbing to a force which seems equally as irresistible as the new dawn. Not weariness...I am becoming lost in the moment. I stare into the inferno before me, and cannot seem to pull my eyes away. I'm not even sure that I want to. The symphonic rhythm of the pounding engine amplifies the hypnotic effect of the fire, and the cab is filled with the incense of coal and oil and smoke.

I am drawn back from the brink. The aroma of bacon crisping on the shovel has broken the spell. The engine crests the hill into a blazing sunrise, and breakfast is served.

As fantasies go, I guess this one might be considered rather tame....even disappointing. After all, it's a little short on the traditional elements - the girls, the Lottery cheque and the tropical island. I'm not dictator of my own country in it, I don't get to put my ex-wife in a giant blender...and Simon Cowell doesn't offer me a contract.

Most people fantasise...and not just about sex. Many choose to escape the mundanity and frustrations of life by creating imaginative scenarios, where they have power, significance or fame. For some, the less capable they are of achieving anything worthwhile, the more outlandish and implausible their fantasies become.

The root of fantasy is discontent. When the real world promises or delivers little, people escape to a place of their own design. My own forays into fantasy are now quite rare, and - as you have seen - really quite bland. I am generally at ease with myself, and comfortable in the real world. A major part of that, is the understanding that my life has purpose, and it has purpose in the context and situation which exists for me *now* - nothing has to change. I'm pretty sure I'll never get to stand on the footplate of an A4 loco. It really doesn't matter: In my relationship with God, there are moments *far more* sublime than that could ever be!