

Preview of My Next Novel

by Kalin - Saturday, January 19, 2013

<http://kalinbooks.com/2013/preview-of-my-next-novel/>

I'm writing another novel. Or more specifically, a massive rewrite of my second novel. Here's a blurb I wrote for it:

This is my diary, a book about me, Allihence, and my thirty-five friends. We are humans, raised in the wild, who don't want to be forced to host another species in our bodies. We have escaped the carathlings and must evade them until we make it to the human villages in the east.

But for me, nothing is real unless I write it down. My friends worry that my obsession with this pen and paper will drive me mad or get us captured, but I can't get this idea out of my head that our story will make a difference in the way our two species communicate.

I still don't have a title. I'm calling it *Rediscovering Communication: The Journals of Allihence and the Wild Ones*, but I'm not particularly happy with that title.

This story was something I came up with around 1996. I started writing it when I was a sophomore in High School but gave up after about fifty pages to write short stories and four years later a novel I called *This Desert Life*, which turned out to be terrible. I came back to write *Rediscovering Communication* again around 2002. I finished it, but it had a few major problems. People really didn't like how Allihence died two-thirds of the way through. I originally intended to bring her back as some kind of mysterious ghost writer for the final chapters of the journal, but that didn't pan out.

Around 2006, somebody claiming to be a world-famous fantasy writer wrote me a series of emails saying that he'd read it and loved certain aspects of it but pointed out all the problems and gave me some advice on how to make it into something sellable. Looking back I realize it was very good advice. I didn't take him seriously at the time and eventually deleted his emails, but years later, I pieced together some of the things he'd said and realized it was Terry Brooks, who is known to go out of his way to help local aspiring authors... or someone doing a good of pretending to be him.

After I wrote my third novel, [Against A Rock](#), in 2008, I looked back over *Rediscovering Communication* and realized I had to remove it and my first novel from my website and hide them both away forever. I started re-writing *Rediscovering Communication* around 2009, but lost interest or something.

Then a couple months ago I listened to a book on Audible called [Room](#) and the unique storytelling style inspired me to come back to this. Now I'm finally back at it and I've got most of the core parts complete, rewritten the beginning and the last third of the book. The main character survives to the very end now

and the ending I feel is dramatically improved.

But the most important change is the theme. The original theme of the story was how we must learn to fight back when it's necessary for our freedom, even if we feel guilty. Now the theme is more focused on peace and reminds me more of an old Star-Trek story where people learn to work together for the benefit of all.

Against a Rock was an uncommon kind of story in that there were no good guys. There were no likable characters. While I love it like my baby, Against a Rock is packed with as much violence, grit, hate and selfishness as possible while still making a compelling story... which is why I love it. Rediscovering Communication is just as abnormal, but in the opposite direction. While there are a couple short violent scenes, overall there are no evil or selfish characters. There is still conflict but every person in the story is working toward the greater good in some way. It's a challenge, and I'm still at least six months out from being able to show off a finished product, but I think this is turning out well.

You may notice I re-used the name Allihence. Basically that's because in 2006 I named my EVE-Online character after my character in the first draft of this novel, then wrote Against a Rock as though it took place on board my character's ship. There is no actual relation between Allihence in this book and Allihence in Against a Rock.

So after enough of my babbling, here is a preview of the first chapter:

Allihence, May 29 afternoon

I don't know what to write. I don't even know where to start.

My home is destroyed. All my papers, all my possessions.

Today the meteors fell with no warning. It wasn't that we missed the warnings. No. There were no warnings.

Everyone is crying; not just the children. The cave walls make the crying and praying echo and burn into my brain. My only consolation is that almost everyone on the island got here safely. Almost.

Have the gods abandoned us? Are they punishing us? Are they still up there?

I won't look up.

This paper is my world right now. If I look up the insanity will overcome me.

I will keep writing.

This is the first page of my second book. My first book, over a thousand pages of articles, free writes, broken hearts, arguments, fishing adventures, poems, stories, and emotional ramblings, was inside my hut

when the meteors hit.

I saw the crater. It's all gone.

I'm dead now. Everything about me was in those pages.

Allihence, May 29 evening

I wrote my last book in an attempt to understand myself. Now I want to write a book for others to get to know me.

I can't do this. I'm trying and trying but I can't. It's not like it was yesterday.

Allihence, May 30 morning

I'm thinking a little more clearly today so lets start from a logical beginning.

I suppose my story starts nine years ago when Marthus negotiated with the carathlings to bring us books, paper and writing supplies in place of the bear hides and grain the rest of us wanted. I had only learned to read and write a year earlier but when I got my first pen I realized I could keep a record of everything I did and everything I am. I wouldn't forget myself when I become a carathling and must share my mind with another. As I grew older, I realized that my writing was my greatest asset, that it would result in my being claimed by a successful carathling family, providing comfort in my second stage of life. Over the years my constantly growing stack of papers became everything to me.

Maybe the gods decided I was too selfish. My first book was all about me, my feelings, my goals and my memories. The gods decided to take them from me yesterday, to destroy them forever, to show me that I should have been concerning my writing with something bigger than myself. At least, this is the thought I have not been able to shake.

So I'm not going to start talking about my youth and recreate the stories I told in my first book. Instead I will try to accept that old Allihence is gone, and start with yesterday morning as I sat on a boulder on the northeast shore of our island, paper and writing board in my lap, pen in hand.

The waves lapped at the base of the rock as I debated over the perfect words to say that I now enjoy spending time with one of the older boys named Doumli.

A boom shook the ground, drowning out the sounds of the sea, startling flocks of birds into flight behind me. A gust of wind blew me back onto the rock, ripping the paper from my hand.

A pillar of water stood on the horizon to the north. A trail of smoke stretched from the heavens.

My first thought was a god had fallen from the sky, but I didn't have time to ponder this as I saw the wave forming from the impact site, rising up and rushing toward me.

I dropped my pen and writing board and jumped to my feet. I leapt from rock to rock, trying to head toward the trail that climbs the dirt cliff to the grassy mesa above, but I looked back and saw the wave approaching too quickly. I had a few moments to jump to a large boulder jutting from the side of the cliff and attempt to climb. I was halfway up before hearing the wave roaring behind me. I wedged my toes into the cracks and debated for a tiny moment jamming my arm deep in a crevice, wondering if my strength would keep me safely in place or the ocean would snap my arm like a chicken bone.

I chose to respect the water and gripped the edge of the crevice, ready to be ripped from my perch. The sea cascaded around me, flattening my stomach and chest, but I tightened my shoulders to keep my head from slamming against the rock. I held tight and a moment later the water settled around my waist, then began to retreat.

For a long moment I held there, trying to process what had just happened. I looked over my shoulder. The pillar of water had disappeared and was now replaced with a white cloud blending into the black line of smoke pointing to the sky. I've seen a couple drawings of meteors hitting the ocean and this seemed similar. A god falling from the sky might look the same.

But I could hear other blasts from the distance, so it only took a few moments to make sure I was safe before I sprinted up the trail to the mesa and started my jog.

The cave is on the south side of the island so I didn't slow except in the few dangerous areas. As I ran, I abandoned my falling god theory after hearing the repeated meteor blasts, most muffled by the ocean, but some clearly impacting the solid ground of our island. This was a normal meteor shower, but felt different because I had never been outside during one. How we had missed the warnings, I could not understand. Perhaps the gods had chosen not to warn us as punishment for something, or to test us or simply to be rid of us. Did the rest of the world receive warnings?

I ran for a long time before I heard crying. I almost ran right past, and had to force my mind to re-think the situation. I had been making a direct line for the safety of the cave when I should have kept my eyes open for anyone in trouble.

I jumped through the bushes. "Whose there?"

The crying was the only response. Someone young, perhaps someone even too young to move around on their own. "Where are you?" I shouted, following the voice.

I jumped into a clearing to see little Dina, gripping a small willow branch in her hand as though it could bat away the meteors. She turned and stared at me.

"You need to follow me to the cave," I said.

She replied with more crying and I imagined her standing here, awaiting the return of her mother, not remembering the carathlings had traded her to the mainland just a few months ago.

“I can carry you part of the way, but we need to go. You need to run, okay?” I ran to the edge of the clearing and beckoned her to follow, but she just stood there wailing.

“Dina!” I shouted, but she didn't move, so I ran toward her to pick her up.

She swung the willow branch at me but I ignored it. “Dina!” I grabbed her by the shoulders and tried to pick her up, but she fought me, screaming louder. “Deimin!” she screamed, finally forming an intelligible word.

“Deimin is nearby?” I asked, taking a step back.

She nodded.

“How long ago?”

But she couldn't answer.

“Did he head for the cave?”

She didn't answer.

“Dina, we need to get you to the cave, okay? If Deimin hasn't found you, he's probably running there already. We can't stay out here and wait for him, okay?”

She shook her head.

I turned toward a rustling and watched Randil jump through the bushes into the clearing. “Dina, I can't find him. We need to go. Allihence?”

“What's going on?” I asked.

“Meteor shower I guess. I don't understand how we were all too stupid to notice the warnings.”

Dina screamed louder.

I squatted before Dina to look at her. “If he's not at the cave we'll get a couple of the older boys to go out for him, okay?”

Randil is much bigger and stronger than myself so he didn't take the time to try and convince her. He picked her up by the shoulders and adjusted her into his arms and started marching south. He pulled the branch from her hands and tossed it aside and she screamed harder.

He carried her briskly and I walked fifty paces ahead of them. Dina cried for most of the trek, but Randil was able to put her down and got her to run with us for much of the distance.

When we arrived at the cave, my people were in chaos, shouting, crying, arguing, praying.

“Alli, Dina and Randil make two hundred and fifteen.” He put a mark next to our names with a chunk of charcoal on a list Marthus and I started years ago.

“There's thirteen still out there.” Gimmin stared a long moment toward the opening, then listed the names of the missing.

I walked through the cave, trying to find a comfortable spot, but as usual, it was packed with people and I had to sit with my arms wrapped around my knees and tuck myself against the wall to avoid being stepped on.

Normally we are calm during a meteor shower, just sitting in here, huddled together, bored, playing games or talking, or in my case, writing. This time it's different.

I sat for a long while, trying to ignore the voices, worrying about my stack of papers sitting in the plain wooden box at the head of my bed. When the sounds of meteors seemed to lull, this caused me to worry more rather than less, thinking I was missing my opportunity to race back to our village and retrieve them.

Finally something clicked and I rose to make my way toward the cave entrance. “I'm running back to the village,” I told Gimmin.

“No,” he said. “Please don't, Alli.”

“I need to.”

“Why, Alli?”

“I need my papers.”

“No you don't. Alli, we still have three missing people out there and three more looking for them.”

“If I find someone on my way I'll bring them back, but if not, I'm going for my papers.”

“Allihence.” He raised his eyebrows at me. “It's paper.”

I knew he wouldn't understand so I turned and ran.

“Alli!” Gimmin's angry shout echoed through the cavern but no one pursued me.

I ran down the trail as quickly as I dared and headed toward the middle of the island, back the way I had come, toward our main village and the clearing where I'd made my home for the last ten years.

I ran most of the way, making better time than I believe I could have under any other circumstances. I heard meteor blasts in the distance and a few that sounded like they had hit the island, but they were notably less frequent now, so I hoped this was a good time. Without the warnings letting us know how long the shower would last, I had no idea if it was winding down or another big wave was on its way.

My chest ached so much by the time I arrived at our clearing that I could not let out a scream when I saw the destruction. I stumbled, feeling like something out of a story book. My legs weakened, as though I would drop to my knees like when the hero of the story watches their home burn. I caught myself before falling, not wanting to be here now, writing something so cliché.

Instead I ran forward, feeling the heat and seeing the smoldering embers from the impact. The crater was three times the size of my hut, leaving nothing recognizable. It had also taken out the edge of Marthus' home. Her roof had collapsed and was now smoldering.

She no doubt had things in there she would have taken to the cave under a normal shower so I took a few moments to catch my breath then began tearing open her wall and pushed the remainder of her roof aside. She had books in two old wooden crates, and though I've read most of them, I could not decide what she would like me to rescue.

I grabbed one of her medicine books, her journal, a pen and some ink from atop her writing board. I figured any more would be cumbersome. I turned to flee back to the cave, then stopped long enough to drag her book chests into the clearing where there would be less chance of fire.

Fortunately most of our important books were kept in Marthus' hut, though we certainly lost a few in mine, including a couple supposedly written by the gods. One is a story of a young boy who steals a talking star wagon and becomes trapped in the heavens above a world where nobody lives, and must figure out how to survive. I've read it a couple times, but it's hard to understand and I'm convinced much of it is nonsense written for fun. The other is a book about rocks and the magics that make them but that's even harder to understand.

I jogged back to the cave, thinking of nothing but the path and the vision of the crater where my home had been.

When I got back, Gimmin and several others made me promise not to leave again. I gave Marthus her medical book and she shrugged, clearly indicating that it wouldn't be of much use to her here. We hadn't suffered any injuries that she couldn't take care of with warm water and bandages. The search party had returned without finding the three people.

I sat down and started going crazy trying to process the loss of my papers. I cared nothing for the loss of my home, my skins, fishing spears, ornaments or even books. All I cared about was my journal. Even the thought of our three comrades, lying injured and helpless somewhere out there, could not shake my thoughts from those sheets of white paper, vaporized under a rock from heaven. Maybe there's something wrong with me.

I wrote yesterday's afternoon entry on the paper I took from Marthus and intended to explain things more coherently, but it was only a short while after I'd started that Zerimile came to me and put his hand over my papers. "Allihence. Counsel Meeting. Back of the cave. Now."

I'm not officially a member of the town counsel so I don't get a vote. I'm the record keeper, so I have more influence than people realize.

We shuffled to the back of the cave and sat in Story Time, which is what we call the ring of sitting rocks we use for puppet shows and storytelling while waiting out the meteors.

I didn't write much about our meeting. We argued about what meteors actually are. Marthus and I have read the books and believe they are giant rocks flying around the heavens and sometimes they fall to our planet. That's a leap of faith for most because we can't explain why these rocks would be wandering the skies, then suddenly change their minds and drop. This begs the question, could one of our moons ever decide to fall?

Debating this is pointless because we will never know.

We also argued about how to keep everyone calm and entertained since we have no books, toys or musical instruments. We announced a comedy show where the person who got the most laughs would be island mayor for a month, which basically means he gets first pick at meal time.

The carathlings were another subject. We realized they had not received any warnings, since they would have showed up to ensure we were prepared. They could have been hit hard. One small meteor could sink either of their patrol boats and a large one could capsize it from a distance. We talked about what we would do if our carathlings had been devastated, but realized different carathlings would come to watch over us.

I worry that writing this next thing is a bad idea. I won't be able to let any carathlings read this, but I'm gonna say it anyway. I know what Marthus was thinking even though she didn't say it. This could be our opportunity to build canoes and get off this island. We could find a place where only humans live, like in those books the carathlings don't know we have.

Marthus also seems to realize she is not going to be able to play her game with the carathlings any longer. She's twenty-four, the eldest on the island by a wide margin. She's not going to be human much longer and won't be able to continue fighting the changover.

However, I'm eighteen and the same goes for me. But now I don't have a stack of pages to prove I should be traded as an intellectual. The thought of becoming a carathling is even scarier now.

But obviously there's nothing we can do to help or escape the carathlings right now so we moved on to the subject of supplies.

The counsel agreed that we would all go hungry. We have almost no food, but we've been hungry before and there is always a bounty after a shower so we agreed that we could wait instead of sending someone outside for food.

Water is a different story. We've run out of water before, even when we have a two-day warning and all our bottles. We had already been hearing arguments over it. We finally decided we had no choice but to put out a call for volunteers to run to the well.

And that was about it for the counsel meeting.

Later we went around collecting empty bottles. The boys stood at the cave entrance for a long time before finally taking off. We sat worrying, but they returned in reasonable time. Unfortunately, with two hundred twenty-five of us, the water drains quickly so we started trying to figure out who will run out next almost as soon as they returned. I volunteered to go, but there were enough stronger boys that they didn't let me.

You might think surviving outside in a meteor shower is all about quick wits, reflexes and toughness. But even the biggest, strongest carathling would turn to ash if hit directly by a meteor. You can't just step to the side when one comes for you.

However, groups of boys have raced out there for water several times now and always come back alive.

It does not look like the three missing are going to make it back. Trinio, Colby, and Kahmad. We're hoping they are holed up under the overhang on the western cliff so we will not speak the words of remembrance until we know for sure. A few have said the trail that runs along the cliff's edge has collapsed so we are all fearing the worst.

I tried to write again in the evening but it didn't go so well. I want to blame it on the lack of candles but really it was in my head.

I thought of Dina and how before I had heard her crying I had been racing for the cave, thinking of nothing but saving myself and how that represents my first book where I wrote mostly about myself to my future self instead of caring about an outside reader. I have certainly spent a share of pages talking about my desire for humans to be able to choose for ourselves when we become carathlings, but much of that was complaining for my own sake rather than trying to spark a change in the world.

All night I ran this over my mind as I tried to sleep on the bare rock, so when there was enough light, I decided to start the next phase of my life by starting my next book.

I'm sitting as near the entrance as I dare, for the sunlight. I have not heard a meteor since a page ago so we are hoping the shower is nearing its end.

This book that I have started today, I want it to be different. I have no idea how my life will play out from this moment, but these sheets of white paper will follow along with it. I don't know how they will represent me, but I promise I will do whatever I can to make this about something bigger than myself.