The National Month Of Pushing Spacebar

by Tom Murphy VII

PRIOR ATTEMPTS at writing a novel had been unsuccessful. Think of all the obstacles: There's the blinking green cursor of the tele-type that you can't figure out how to turn off. And when you put tape on the screen to cover it up, then it keeps moving whenever you make progress on the novel, except if you count progress like deleting some piece of text and adding new, better text of equal length. Or like, making the font of the whole book smaller with each added letter, like when you're typing your name onto a sticky name badge and you decide to add the ceremonial "Ph.D." and "D.D.S." without realizing that due to horizontal space constraints, they will diminish the gravitas of the rest of your name, as measured in point size, except you can't turn back now. And also you can't do that on a tele-type on account of it only has one font, built into the Rondom Occess Memory, called Times New Rondom, which is also green and looks like it was invented for other computers to read, which makes you feel like a robot-man or -woman ("wo-bot"), who are known to not be able to write novels except like "1001010101: A Tale Of Two Bitties" by C++harles D:\ickens. So that is stymying.

Then you discovered the National Novel Writing Month a.k.a. NaNoWriMo,[1] the creatively capitalized internet web page that encourages stymied novel writers to risk their jobs, romantic entanglements, and friendships for the chance to self-publish horrendous exigent fantasy pastiche, thinly-veiled Twilight, Harry Potter, and Dr. Who crossover fanfic, or offensively self-referential poo-poop kinda like this. All you need to do is set aside 120 hours in the month of November to jot down 50,000 words that have something to do with each other, and declare victory. Maybe even pay a small fee for a publishing service that provides you with a UPC-like number precomputed to have a

[1]http://nanowrimo.org/

valid check digit, and an obligation to purchase too many copies of your work at nearly novel-low prices.

And you did that too, but what shame! After customizing your profile and packing the fridge up with the right snacks (things you once saw someone who you consider health-conscious and knowledgeable about food things bring to a party), and writing a purple description of your main character, who was just by the way a faint simulacrum of either you (but cooler), your imaginary girl/boyfriend, your World of Warcraft character, or something like that, but anyway doesn't matter because after writing that beginning bit and a little bit of not-thought-through plot thickening, it all dried up again.

But enough about that because, sitting afore the pale computer glow or perhaps with a hardcopy in hand patiently awaiting a talk to finish at a prestigious academic conference, you are now discovering the solution: The National Month of Pushing Spacebar. This annual competition, fresh as angel diapers, the spring chicken of massively-singleplayer forced-creativity suicide pacts, challenges you to achieve your dream of producing a novel-sized document without the creative stress and feelings of inadequacy that come from having that document also contain original content.

The premise is simple: During the National Month, push spacebar. The National Month begins on Friday 30 March 2012 to coincide with the prestigious academic conference SIG-BOVIK, and ends at $23\!:\!59\!:\!59.\overline{9}$ eastern-jingoist-time on Sunday 29 April 2012, not including the final day of the only-partially-national month of April, for a nice round 31 days. Due to no bullshits having to do with leap anything or 2nd extended deadline, this comprises exactly 44,640 minutes. Success constitutes pressing the spacebar 100,000 times, which yields a novella of approximately 33 pages, consisting only of whitespace. The best

part is you don't need to think about anything hard or worry that it won't turn out good, because it can only be spaces. 100,000 elegantly simple, stress-relieving spaces.

Your eyebrows perk up with interest. Actually one eyebrow goes up and the other goes down. Can the NaMoOfPuSp be the real deal Holyfield? Indeed it may, sir or madam. With one finger in the air politely to indicate *pause*, you wonder, "What more about the logistics shall I know?"

Well, first things first, get this in your web browser's location indicator box thing pronto:

http://national.month.of.pushing.spacebar.org/

Next you can do the usual stuff involving making an account and customizing the profile. To avoid the distractions and body dysmorphic stressors having to do with selecting a profile picture that adequately captures your on-line persona while attracting potential mates without seeming too self-involved or pimply (if male) or confusing potential creepers as to attractiveness status or gender appropriateness (if female), you can only select one of two faceless grey line drawings as your profile avatar.

"Endless customization options totaling 1 bit of entropy!" you exclaim. "What other fields can I type in?"

Well, don't get too excited but you can also modify the title of your book, and you can set your status message, which allows you to do social networking. These can only consist of spaces, but beware, for *they do not count towards your total number of spaces pressed.* To prevent cardiac involvement, a preview of the profile customization interface is presented in Figure 1, which should reduce arousal upon seeing it for the first time.
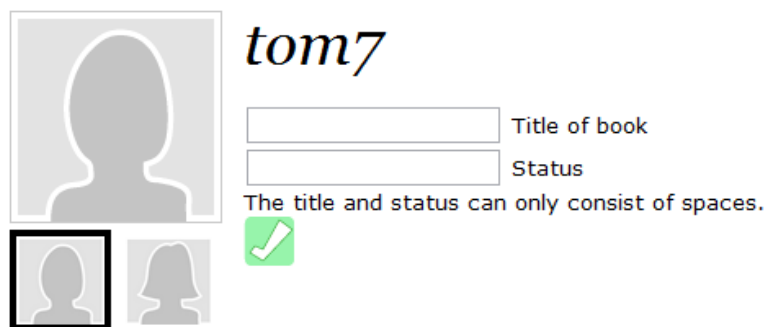
Figure 1: This is what it looks like when you're customizing your profile (well, my profile).

You're looking peppier already, and you say zestfully, "Aw right! Profile customized. Networks socialed. Now what?"

The next thing is to push spacebar. When on the proper page, pushing spacebar records the action and instantly apprises you of your progress. A bunch of data boxes and graph things show math entertainment for you as you press, and the counter indicates your tally front and center. How you type spaces is up to you. Some people prefer to *push*, others to *press*. Of course you can't just hold down the spacebar, duh.

Warning: Repeatedly pressing the spacebar, or any key, can cause repetitive stress injury. Just kidding! Nobody needs to worry about that. It's a fake disease for hypochondriacs like fibromyalgia. Just kidding about kidding! It's totally real. So's fibromyalgia! So's hypochondriasis! Just kidding! You totally have that! You're dying inside! Actually your hands are going to fall off from all the pressing! But seriously, press the spacebar gingerly and without repetitive stress, or RSI can be yours, truly. FALSE! DOUBLE FALSE! I was kidding! Hehe

but really. Quotes around the whole thing.

Warning: If you try to do crazytimes stuff like have multi different computer devices all pushing spacebars at the same account at the same simultaneous, then you might lose record of some spacebars. Don't do that. It's crazy!

Hippies must turn on Javascript.

Y OU CAN PRESS spacebar all day and night, as far as I'm concerned, but the best strategies probably involve doing a bit each day until you get pretty sick of it. 3,226 spaces a day will get you to 100,000 just on time. The graphs help you see how you've been performing on a daily basis and what your pace needs to be for the rest of the national month, in order to reach the goal, pro-rated based on how much you've done. This thing is totally fancy. Also if you have the home page open, you can watch the progress of yourself and your "friends", and the numbers just like change right before your eyes like some kind of fucking wizard did that.

O H BY THE way, I wanted to point out a little funny mystery here which was curious. Take a looksee at Figure 2.

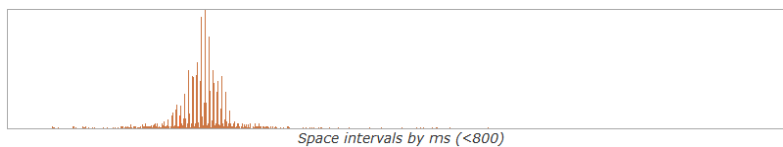*Space intervals by ms (<800)*

Figure 2: Someone has taken a comb filter to our spacebars. What is that about?

What we have here, muffin, is the distribution of intervals between space pushes in one practice session of pushing by the author.[2] What the f? We see the expected Gaussian distribution centered around 200 milliseconds. We also see fairly inexplicable regularly-spaced gaps in the otherwise pretty nicely shaped bell curve: A gap of 202 milliseconds occurs about a hundred times, 203 milliseconds about 20, 204 milliseconds only 4, 205 milliseconds only 6, then back up to 90 times for 206 ms. Why no love for milliseconds 204 & 205? It's like even though my spacebar presses have some random variance in them centered around the mean, there is much less randomness in the lowest digit. That don't make no sense, sugar, which is to say that it does not make sense. At least for a moment and then you realize there's probably some discretization thingy going on inside the Chrome browser that causes events to be more likey to be processed at certain times at certain interval-intervals which is not that disturbing after all, except that it also happens in the Safari browser? This may be a mystery that we never solve, candypants, and that's just how the world works sometimes.

In th IS PAPERWORK, I told the tale of NaMoOfPuSp, in an attempt to engage you in its competitive spirit. Combining compressive art movements like NaNoWriMo and Album-a-Day with the increment-operator-based gameplay of World of Warcraft and Battlefield 3 (themselves popular topics of NaNoWriMo and Album-a-Day works), the National Month of Pushing Spacebar provides a way to achieve your creative dreams without actu-

[2]Don't get worried. Although the author is participating in this year's NaMoOfPuSp, and expects to whoop all y'all, he is not starting early or nuthin', he's just workin' out the kinks in the web-site. Everybody starts from scratch at the beginning of the National Month.

ally being creative, a way as fresh as celery from the crisper &
princes of Bel-Air. So let's get on with it! Right now, even while
you read this, you could be pressing spacebar. And who knows,
maybe you could be the next whatever that chick is that wrote
Twilight, or John Cage? It's never too late to join! (Unless it's
after April 30, 2012.)

You can't click, but you could type:

http://national.month.of.pushing.spacebar.org/

Only you, or perhaps someone with your druthers, can pre-
vent forest fires.