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## **Just Thinking, 01/06/03:**

### **Just a Weekend Conversation**

by Justin Katz

My father has suggested that I concentrate on writing the “slice of life” variety of these columns. Personally, I enjoy writing those vignettes, indulging in the tone that they generally take, and I find them to be less labor-intensive than essays on more-detailed topics. I can also understand why a parent would prefer such material. However, other readers have expressed interest in hearing my opinions on current events, and still others respond more frequently when the subject matter is abstract and/or theological.

Ever since I began leaning toward a creative/artistic career of some sort, I’ve been lectured on the value of formula and consistency. There is, of course, room for growth within such narrow guidelines, but I’ve found that I ultimately tire of even the most-talented writers with even the most-compelling formulas. That’s as a reader, and readers can drift away from and then back to an author’s work. One cannot drift away from one’s self, however, and I cannot imagine spending years churning out essays of only moderate variance. Therefore, I’d decided to let my column be whatever I wanted it to be any given week.

I’ll be honest: this particular composition was nearly an announcement of the end of the *Just Thinking* column. My Web log (blog), *Dust in the Light*, covers most of the ground from which I had been harvesting my ideas. Although entries of such limited length and polish are not

the sort of writing that may be sold to magazines and newspapers, the blog was responsible for the 1,000% growth of my Web site's traffic in the latter half of 2002. *Just Thinking*, by comparison, hardly represented a blip on the trend line.

The blog, however, lends itself to short bursts of inspiration that address topical subjects. When bloggers treat their Web sites as journals, the result often too closely resembles a censored diary to be interesting. And posts that seek to make abstract points stretch, by necessity, to at least the length of my average column. For this reason, I had thought to follow my father's advice, to a degree, and mine my inner life for my columns, while using *Dust in the Light* to reap the sprouts of current events.

But a new technology has appeared that, at this time, is most effectively placed on soil with value that lies below the surface. As far as I know, I am only the second blogger (beaten merely by days) to begin video blogging, or vlogging, and the response has been overwhelmingly positive. Unfortunately, the grip that resources for video information keep on their content is exponentially tighter than that which holds text. In other words, it is extremely difficult (and perhaps legally risky) to "quote" video from news stories and commentary in the same manner in which bloggers quote the corresponding text. Therefore, vlogging seems destined to begin on the "slice of life" tract, where the available video, being more personal, is more accessible.

Vlogging is also more time-consuming than the various forms of writing that I've been pursuing. And time has become a huge consideration, now that I've reached the point at which my passions — music and longer, more artistic, writing — are being inhibited by "my likes." In fact, evidence that redirecting my weekly effort to serialized fiction could conceivably prove more beneficial to my career was what nearly pushed *Just Thinking* off of my To Do list.

Blogger John Scalzi had been serializing a science fiction novel and intended to make it available on the Internet. As it happened, a publisher bought the rights to the book and offered

Mr. Scalzi a two-book contract. The fact that such a break is possible makes it a tantalizing proposition to serialize the work that I feel so desperate to move forward.

My creative work, however, is too intricate to hold to regular deadlines, at least deadlines that are frequent enough to carry the reader from iteration to iteration. Taking a longer view, the work is extremely complex, and frequent changes until the entire rough draft is complete could rearrange previous sections right under regular readers' feet. Moreover, imitating methods of success in this business seems sometimes like standing, with arms outstretched, in the same spot as another who has been struck by a desirable bolt of lightning. One would be wise, perhaps, to linger in the same area, the same field, as a stricken luckster, but too near a repetition is likely to bring little more than an embarrassing tingle and second-guesses as to where I should have been standing.

Plus, I enjoy writing these columns. They still represent a different type of writing than the blog entries, even when I write about the same subject matter. I've also found it rewarding to force the discipline upon myself. And, of course, for my efforts, I'll have a finished book each year, like the one that is currently in the hands of the printer, which goes even further than the column itself in differentiating my work from that of my fellow bloggers, many of whom are hobbyists. The bottom line is that *Just Thinking* just fits well in the range of my work and in the progress of my career — between the flashy, but entry-level, blog and longer works. I like the variety, and I like having the excuse to sit with you for a while each week.