

**LARRY:** Well, it has been an “interesting” year for me; that is, the parts I can remember! Unfortunately, I did not meet last year’s goal of getting my health back fully or even writing another advanced engineering book for online games. The year started with taking some time off to heal, while building a book outline as a background process. But the many, many drugs fizzing through my veins made concentration on anything rather difficult and the increasing pain and growing lack of alternate treatments to try led to a period of black depression, acute memory loss and frequent collapses that kept reminding me of a puppet with cut strings. I did manage to get a book outline together, but it had to meet my constant craving for something new to allow my focus to carry over multiple writing sessions and blackout periods. So I turned to a long-term goal of mine: writing a science fiction book, a task that I know little of and thus providing the intellectual challenge I needed. Titled *Incan Invasion*, it is an alternate history story set in the pre-Columbian period: die-hard do-gooders travel back through time to save the Native American cultures, but alas, their well-intentioned goal turns on them as the powerful Incan civilization uses their help to accelerate their quest for global conquest! If you have not read *Guns, Germs and Steel* or *1491: the Americas before Columbus*, pick them up—they are nothing short of brilliant, even if history is not your usual thing.

As the year draws to a close, the number of doctors who can’t figure out what is causing the stabbing neck and back pains, or the numbness and loss of control in my hands is now over a dozen. The latest attempt was to go inside the spine with a mini-laser and burn out one nerve that only carries pain! That, like so many other treatments, helped for a while but appears not to be sticking. Fortunately, I am now acclimated to the drug load, so I’ve been doing a bit of consulting, contract writing and teaching, and gave two industry lectures over the year on data mining in online games. I’m trying to introduce the notion of metrics-driven development as the logical successor to test-driven development, pulling data from the three major sources: Players, Performance, and Pipeline. Finally, after years of fruitless waiting for doctors to find something that they can fix, I am now trying to do some research on myself: a series of experiments and analysis feeding into a white paper.

Yours truly, Larry (maggot rancher, university bum, parallel simulation, virtual worlds, online games and upcoming amateur neurologist!)

**MICHELLE:** “Interesting” is certainly the best word for the year. It seemed to start out on a promising note. At the end of January I began working full-time at LeapFrog (educational toys!), which has turned out to be a dream job. I’m a Copy Editor/Copywriter which means I work on writing and editing product packaging, parent guides, marketing materials, and even a few print and radio ads. My supervisor is one of the women from my writing group a few years back, and our art directors and project managers are amazing people. Unfortunately, there have been two sets of layoffs in the 11 months I’ve been there, and the poor holiday shopping season makes it likely more will come in the New Year. I’ve worked a bit on my own writing, but between the job uncertainty stress and the stress over Larry’s health, I’m not getting very far on any short stories and the novel is stalled.

My job does provide benefits to help with the near-army of doctors Larry has been seeing this year and the mini-pharmacy they’ve prescribed for him. Unfortunately, I’m not plagued with the same memory loss issues he’s been having, so his panic attacks, collapsing, sleepwalking and countless other scary events of the year still loom large with me. And though I understand the current needs for the medication, I’m pushing for us to stay on the lookout for the next therapy regimen as we make financial contingency plans in case the axe does fall on my job.

Thankfully the year hasn’t been all doom and gloom. Larry’s mom came to visit this spring and his dad visited a few times this fall. I was reunited with my college friends (the L-Mates!) this summer for the beautiful Vermont wedding of our friend Strother, and our friend Anne just recently had her second girl, bringing the grand total of “L-Kinder” up to 8(!). My parents came out to visit over the week of Thanksgiving, and Larry and I are heading to their house over Christmas for a much-needed rest and rejuvenation period.

We ask that you please be patient with us as we continue to struggle through this difficult time; we know we haven’t been the best at keeping up with all of you. But we appreciate your support and good wishes and wish you all a healthy and happy holiday season as we enter 2009.