

## New Model No. 15

Kris King – January 31<sup>st</sup> 2012

<http://www.rantinaminor.co.uk/2012/01/new-model-no-15>

I don't know about you, but when I heard the news this week that the twin bills SOPA (Screwing Over Proper Artists) and PIPA (Positively Invading People's Anuses) had suffered a humiliating defeat/climbdown when pretty much the entire world told the entertainment industry to go fuck itself and stop trying to ruin the internet, I breathed a huge sigh of relief, wiped the self-satisfied "Ha ha, we did it!" grin off my face, and then started to wonder just what kind of monstrous form the bills will take on once Hollywood and the record companies had re-grouped and returned to begin the next leg of their "Stealing Freedom Tour 1996 – 2047". For reasons I can only imagine have something to do with my brain feeling particularly charitable (knowing that I had a blog post to write and no ideas), these thoughts began colliding with ones about the nature of religion versus science and how, as it is with content producers versus the internet, the battle is about nothing more than destroying the competition in order to protect an obsolete business model.

Although I've somewhat already touched on the subject of how record companies and movie studios are attempting to change the law as a means to preserving their respective monopolies in a [previous post](#), the issue is one of sufficient importance and, at the moment, pressing relevance that it bears reiterating. Since the internet became a dominant presence in the lives of pretty much everyone, businesses the world over have been struggling to figure out how best to adapt to the cultural changes it has wrought and, more importantly, how they can continue to make money in an economy irrevocably altered by a global communications network that smashed through technological and geographical boundaries like a cruise missile punching its way through a fortress made of wishful thinking and a unicorn's loveliest dreams. How does one cope with a medium that strips to the core the protections that had been enjoyed, and heavily exploited, by traditional business models ever since the first corporate accountant crawled out of the primordial sea and proposed the idea of a primordial offshore bank?

While no-one would argue that the seemingly ceaseless advances made in computing technology (Packard Bell aside) have allowed anyone to make perfect copies of books, music, and movies, and the evolution of the internet has made distributing them across the world whilst maintaining flawless digital fidelity an absolute doddle for even the most incompetent of PC owners, the argument that the "piracy" of such intellectual property is the greatest threat to the content industries is specious at best, and completely dishonest at worst. Yes it's true that, if you know where to look, you can obtain almost anything you want over the internet without having to pay for it, but what really has the record executives and studio heads shitting bullets into their collective financial trousers is *not* the fact that every teenager and his modem are ripping off Insane Clown Posse's latest album without having to part with a single penny (if anything they're delighted that someone actually *wants* to listen to that exercise in educational back-peddalling because it means they might be dumb enough to go where the real money lies and buy concert tickets).

The truth is that what has *really* got Universal, Sony, and all the other media giants, quaking in their boots and firing off lobbyists with "campaign contributions" at every elected representative with loose morals and a poor understanding of the situation, is that the business model upon which they have relied for so long to keep them in Lear jets, swimming pools, and whores is now fundamentally obsolete. There used to be a time when, if you wanted to write a novel, record an album, or make a movie, and you presumably wanted it to be a little more than just a shonky, amateurish affair that only ever gets seen by a circle of friends and sympathetic family members who applaud your efforts (if not your ability) simply because they're duty bound to, then you had **no** choice but to fling your work, your sense of self-worth, and likely your future financial stability upon the mercy (what there was of it) of those who had a complete stranglehold over the numerous chains of cinemas, book stores, and record shops.

For a century or more, the media companies have acted as gatekeepers to the channels of distribution, and no-one could get past without lubing up and adhering to their rules. The rise of the

internet and the massive increase in home computing power over the last 20 years has meant that the gatekeepers, and the monopolies they protect, have been living on borrowed time. With barely £1,000 in their pocket, an individual can purchase a PC of sufficient power, and some suitable software (we're assuming of course that they are already in possession of the requisite musical instruments), and record an album in their own home that, while not necessarily of commercial quality, would not be far from it. If they've got some change left over, they can get hosting for a website through which to distribute the album digitally and keep 100% of the profit; no record company tying them to a fixed contract like indentured servants, no having to churn out three albums to pay back the advance before seeing any royalties (assuming they aren't bankrupted first), and no being dictated to creatively in the name of commerciality.

It is the freedom that the internet affords *artists*, not criminals, that worries the industry most because it has almost entirely eliminated their role; they are ultimately **redundant**. Why would *anyone* work their balls off to see over 90% of the profit they generate go to those who parasitise them when they can enjoy complete creative freedom **and** keep all the money for themselves? When the industry goes running to governments begging for protection, it's not about crushing the theft of intellectual property, it's about crushing the *competition*. They're not interested in defending the right of their artists to earn a living, as they so frequently and dishonestly claim; they just want to preserve the right to exploit their artists and maintain the monopoly they've built up. The shutting down of MegaUpload was not so much about halting piracy as it was to cripple their plans to launch MegaBox: a music distribution service (think iTunes), currently in beta, where artists would receive over 90% of the profit from sales.

This refusal to accept that the world is changing around them (and that they must change with it or die), coupled with their employing the full weight of the law and a near-bottomless barrel of money to threaten and subdue anyone who dares challenge the status quo they have fought so hard to preserve, is almost the *exact* same attitude that religion has taken towards science (only with less burning at the stake). If you're questioning whether that's a reasonable or even sound analogy then you should remember that, if you strip away the layers of ancient tradition and superstition, all the beliefs, the holy texts, the rites, rituals, and the endless talk of the sacred and the sinful, you'll discover that, underneath it all, religion is just a *business*. As with any corporation, the church has a hierarchical structure, CEOs, regional heads, subsidiaries, divisions, and local branches; they have a well-defined, globally-recognised brand image, a company ethos, an advertising strategy, and a host (pun totally intended) of products and services for which they charge their customers.

Without doubt the greatest product religion ever sold (if you can't see what I did there you might want to expand your cultural reference library) was the pretence of it being the source of truth. For thousands of years *every* major religion has sold its customers the demonstrable lie that it alone could answer the profound and eternal questions of life; they promised explanations where there were none so that we might dispel our ignorance and put to rest our most basic fears of the unknown. In all that time they have delivered absolutely **nothing**, and they continue to deliver nothing, *save for the illusion* of wisdom and peace, each and every day to their billions of customers, and to the tune of many billions of dollars in profit. In essence, it's the perfect business because they get to sell people a product, the veracity, or even *existence*, of which can only ever be truly verified when the customer stops breathing and starts to smell bad. What's even better, at least for the business, is that it's far too late by then for the customer to demand a refund.

It may be hard to imagine but, historically, the church used to actually support and encourage scientific endeavour, and becoming a priest was one of the best ways to get to be able to spend your time researching the mysteries of the natural world. Sooner or later, however, science started to answer the questions that religion couldn't, questions that had been previously dismissed with the old standby response of "god did it", and it was clear that this was going to be a problem. Religion has always relied on the gullibility of its customers in keeping them from questioning the church's claims or pronouncements; their very survival as a business depends on them being able to strip their adherents of all curiosity in order that they don't ask awkward questions, and all because, deep down, they *know* that their claims are emptier than that bit of Bill O'Reilly's brain where he keeps his humility, and they have less support than Michelle Bachmann making a run for the presidency of GLAAD. When the whole point of faith is to believe without question, faith has got to do *everything* in its power to keep the faithful both indifferent and ignorant.

As our scientific knowledge expanded, and revealed the staggering reality of the complex mechanisms that power our world, it found itself impinging upon what religion had always (wrongly) assumed to be *its* exclusive territory. With more and more of the "truths" offered by our holy men

being exposed as either the misguided ignorance of the tent-dwelling goat-botherers that had been originally responsible for the scriptures, or the outright falsehoods of the far better educated sociopaths who came after and injected their own agendas, religion's credibility as a provider of answers was starting to be eroded permanently by the forward march of science. Every new discovery we make fills a gap in our knowledge, leaving one less place for god to hide in; with every new theory we formulate, and every piece of evidence we collect to back it up, the relevance of religion dwindles, the necessity of its "product" decreases, and the power of the faith over a population simply wanes to the point of non-existence.

In the same way that the internet and home computing power (both products of science, remember – neither were invented by people praying for them to magically exist) have shown that musicians no longer need record companies, science has shown that people no longer need religion (one could reasonably argue that they never did). The theory of evolution has rendered god unnecessary as an answer to the question of biodiversity; the big bang theory eliminates the need for a deity in explaining how our universe formed; germ theory, the discovery of bacteria, and our understanding of mental health issues forever banish the notion of people being possessed by devils to ancient superstition and instead replace it with the demonstrable idea that they are simply *ill* (I'm excluding Jedward from this, obviously – if there are such things as demons then it would make perfect sense that those two festering anal boils are at least under some kind of satanic control ... oh wait, I just remembered they're managed by Simon Cowell – carry on).

Rather than adapting to an ever-shifting world, religion, like the entertainment industry, seems to prefer instead to stubbornly refuse to change, or even compromise, in any way whatsoever, a bit like a Daily Mail reader who sees the evolving ethnic landscape of our country not as a positive demonstration of how we're probably the most successfully integrated multicultural society in the world (and that that's something to be proud of), but as a sign that everything's going to the dogs because things are "not what they used to be, like back in my day, when I was young and we didn't have darkies living next door keeping us up all night with their jungle music". The religious business model is moribund; what may appear to be signs of life are little more than the spasms incurred by the varying churches trying desperately to maintain the pretence of animation by attaching strings to its arms while they plead with governments for help in propping up the corpse (and maybe some funds for a hat and sunglasses to put on it, "Weekend At Bernie's" style).

No, instead the church kicks off like a petulant child, screaming, bitching, whining, and telling sob stories to the state about how their followers are being persecuted, victimised by those who want to take away the special privilege and protections they've enjoyed ever since church and state were one and the same thing. "The mean old scientists are picking on us with their facts and evidence!", they plead. "Tell them that they have to let us play, and tell them that we don't have to follow their rules either because we're special!" With every new day, another self-pitying bullshit cry shrieks forth ... if it's not, "Help! The queers, dykes, and trannies are trying to stop us from bullying and denying them equality! Someone arrest them for sodomy and stuff!" then it's, "the liberal atheists are saying we can't put a statue of Jesus in the town square and use their taxes to pay for it! Deport them for the sake of the children!"

The intelligent design movement is probably the best example of how religions, like the content producers, are dishonestly trying to obtain legal protection for an outdated business model that they're either unable, or unwilling, to update for the 21st century. By pretending that their existence is under threat (from something other than their own short-sightedness and abject ignorance, of course), or that their right to ruin everything decent was somehow being infringed upon by the dogged insistence of scientists that ideas should be able to support themselves with that pesky little thing called "proof", religion has created situations like [Kitzmiller v Dover](#), where unsupported creationist horse-shit (hiding behind the label of "intelligent design") tried to pass itself off as a valid scientific theory that should be taught alongside evolution. It doesn't matter that there is more evidence for the existence of dragons than there is to support ID; "teach the controversy", they said ... it didn't matter that there wasn't one.

Whether it's trying to force school children to take classes in intellectual surrender, or some other disgusting attempt to subvert the scientific enterprise, religion is nothing if not hypocritical in its approach. It's okay when science serves *their* purposes or furthers *their* agenda; they love, for example, that the printing press, television, radio, and the internet have all helped them spread their message far and wide ... but as soon as people use those wonderful products of science to publish Harry Potter books, broadcast "South Park", play Marilyn Manson records, and distribute porn, then they're evil inventions of a godless society that's lost its way, and they must be regulated and

controlled before they rape our children's heads with video game violence, chocolate-flavoured heroin, and naked bottoms. It's no different from how the music and movie industries see things; to them the internet is full of pirates who steal music, download films, and join terrorist cells at the weekend – except for the good consumers who use iTunes, Amazon, Netflix, and all the other corporate money pits they've set up online for us to fall in to.

It seems almost fitting that the internet is a massive thorn in the arse of both the media *and* metaphysical industries (especially since they both specialise in forcing us to listen to their shit). A worldwide network of interconnected computers that allow for the near seamless free flow of data and ideas is surely death for anything that cannot survive even a modicum of challenge or scrutiny. Just as MPEG compression, home recording software, digital cameras, and easy web hosting for global distribution marked the beginning of the end for the owners of traditional content channels, so discussion forums, blogs, and social media have helped sound the death knell for religious indoctrination. Dogma cannot survive in an environment where there is no restriction on free enquiry, where nothing is protected from criticism, nothing is beyond discussion, and no idea is safe from the scrutinising eye and arse-tearing claws of a community of millions. It's always a great moment when the world looks at those who seek to control it for their own ends and says, "No – we've got a **better** way of doing this".

There was a time when religion and the state were one; now we have religion, desperately trying to mobilise the rapidly diminishing power they have over the elected in order that they might keep the crumbling, defective edifice of their outdated and outmoded ideology from collapsing that little bit further. There was a time when they could put scientists in jail, or even to death, for refusing to bend, bury, or bastardise the discoveries that contradicted an established orthodoxy – not any more. Religion no longer has that power, and we have secular, humanistic ideals like scepticism, free thought, and a morality that doesn't involve burning to thank for it. We have the ability, the right, probably even the *duty* to stand up and say, "No, we're doing it *this* way – you can either come along with us, or you can stay behind and die".

And, if they're unwilling to come along, to change, to adapt, to *evolve*, then I say fuck 'em ... at least future scientists will have some interesting new dinosaurs to study ...

