



Off-Topic: The Story of an Internet Revolt

G.R. Reader

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In September 2013, the Goodreads book reviewing site, which had previously operated a strict policy of free speech, began censoring reviews. The reviewers fought back, and the conflict was soon being reported in the mainstream media.

This is the story of what happened, told in the protesters' own words.

Off-Topic: The Story of an Internet Revolt Details

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Carol. says

I recently read a book that encapsulates this whole debacle in a nutshell:
<http://carols.booklikes.com/post/6817...>

You see, Goodreads billed itself as a social website, building itself through (free) social networking, contributors relying on the sense of community. Suddenly, it turned business model, and started applying business structure. Needless to say, many felt betrayed.

Sadly, although I had my foot in the door on this book, I was unable to adapt to Google Groups--for obvious reasons, building the book had to be moved off-site, not the least of which was threatened removal of many of the contributors--and my normal inattention to my gmail box meant although it was stuffed full, I was able to safely ignore it.

Kudos to the movers and shakers to took this elaborate prank and made something interesting and creative out of the whole debacle.

Though I have lost my taste for active protest and have not decided how to use GR anymore, I am so disillusioned by the site owners that I will never be as active or prolific as I was.

Bezos, monetize away!

Steph Sinclair says

I've debated on what I should write in this review space. Usually I'm a pretty sarcastic person, flinging jokes left and right to entertain during what could be a really dull review. But for this, I'm less inclined to since I'm close to the source material, witnessed the production of this book and contributed two pieces.

This is a non-profit book, so none of the contributors are making any money from this production. You can buy it for \$.99 (it's the lowest price LuLu let us set it) or you can read it for free here.

So I'll just ramble about my Random Off Topic Feelings.

I've been dealing with Goodreads/author drama for two years now. And I remember when I first joined Goodreads, I didn't know that authors were even on this site, let alone reading reviews. My thought was, "WHY? Why would a person want to read my insignificant thoughts on their book?" At the time, my reviews existed only to entertain myself and my very small group of friends. It was fun and exciting to find people who loved to read as much as I did, so it's no surprise that Goodreads quickly became my favorite Internet place to visit. But then the drama started, and little by little I found my joy for reviewing dwindling.

I don't review or read as much as I used to, which has me feeling some kind of way. I'm ashamed to admit that I've struggled writing reviews. I second guess words or phrases. Will the author flip out over this one star review? Will the author send his/her band of loyal fans to downvote my review on Amazon? Is this

review too controversial? Will someone accuse me of bullying someone? It's maddening. It's gotten to the point where I cringe sometimes when I see a notification on certain reviews. There were already too many fucking people in my review space... and now there's Goodreads too.

I won't lie that I feel personally betrayed and hurt by how Goodreads has done a few things. Some of that stems from things that aren't publicly known (and they'll stay that way, so don't even begin to ask me) and some of it from the part of me that is just fed up with being singled out. It's happened a little too often for my liking this year and I'm just so over the bullshit.

This is getting rather depressing, so I'll make my point. Seeing the production of this book has reminded me why I love the people on Goodreads when I was starting to forget. To see first hand the determination and dedication from people who I've followed and admired for years was incredible. Their drive and motivation to continue on and power through when I felt my own waning is inspiring. These are my people with their flaws, controversies, passion, sophistication, crude humor, sarcasm, irrelevance, brilliance. In true *Pitch Perfect* flavor:

Kaethe says

update 11/6/2012: I just wrote this elsewhere, but I think it says something apropos, so I'm quoting myself, which is no doubt worst possible manners. Sorry in advance.

I've been in and around book sales and publishing since 1986. I've met authors who behaved like asses, and I'm kind of inured to it. But prior to GoodReads deleting user's reviews and shelves and lists without warning, I've never seen anyone take the side of authors treating readers badly. Orson Scott Card is widely-known as a homophobe, but at least he doesn't pick on individual readers. I'm not surprised that a small group of self-published authors would act evil, but I'm gobsmacked that GoodReads would choose to support the lunatic fringe in censorship. As a business decision for a book community, that seems suicidal.

You know, I used to be one of the names regularly appearing on the monthly lists that GoodReads used to run. Then the powers-that-be decided to take the unprecedented action of deleting reviews that didn't meet vague standards of topicality.

You can read the whole long, sordid saga for yourself. But here's my take: Otis Chandler, founder and owner of GoodReads made some undisclosed but probably very large sum of money selling GoodReads to Amazon. What he sold is access to readers. Not just our eyeballs for ads, but the reviews, ratings, shelves, and accurate catalog data that we have collectively supplied. Some of that data, shelves and reviews, was unacceptable to some authors, who consider it our duty to promote their books as they see fit. So rather than wait for GR staff to delete my reviews, I went ahead and ported them all over to BookLikes. You may not be interested in my reviews, and that's fine, I never expected anyone to be. But this was my catalog of my reading life, and nothing is scarier to me than the possibility that someone else was going to decide what I got to keep. I've had a TBR list for more than twenty years, and a reading log as long. I've lost data in system and software and website changes over the years, and painstakingly recreated it. I've no interest in providing my data for free without even the certainty of knowing I get to keep it. My reading log means a great deal to

me, even if no one else ever sees it. Deleting data without warning was unforgivable.

Emma Sea says

Full disclosure: my piece on Goodreads' censorship is reprinted in here.

By ~~the pirate code~~ my code, I can't rate the book, 'cos my work's in it. But it does collect a wide range of responses to the Goodreads TOS debacle and I think it's worth having a look at. Although you may be sick and tired of the whole thing. Which I'd understand.

But one day I'll fire up my ancient e-reader and force my great-grandchildren to look at something called a pee dee eff. I'll show them that when the quaint 20th century notion called 'uncensored speech' took another lurch in its shuffle off this mortal coil, we did not take it lying down, but instead raged in CAPS ITALICS BOLD UNDERLINE INTERROBANG.¹

¹ ©Ayanna

Alfaniel Aldavan says

This is the live document of what happened in the Goodreads community.

This book was removed a while ago from the GoodReads site itself. Some said it wasn't "a real book". That is was a story that was never told.

But the story wanted to be told. People stood up against removal of your words, arbitrary enforcements that remove your speech from sight, against the transformation of a site for booklovers in a site for marketing, against so called rules that enable unwanted thoughts to be struck down and no longer heard.

These are your words.

The story wanted to be told, and we listened. We put your words together, tied the pages, and made this collection of your words a document of the September/October 2013 protests of Goodreaders to censorship.

I've seen people and media ignoring the real extent of the deletions. This book will give you numbers and examples.

I've seen misunderstandings of why people object. This book will give you answers.

We have been told long ago, that the internet will become private yards, walled gardens from where only approved speech will be heard. Sooner or later, the private owner "curates" their space from unwanted speech.

When censorship came to GoodReads, this is what happened.

You can read the entire book online here for free, legally, Creative Commons licensed.

Note: In his collection of community reviews, it looks like Mr. G.R. Reader has found around here and has included my review of The Art of War: Corporate Takeover of User Rights.

This work by Alfaniel is licensed under CC-BY-SA 3.0.

Carly says

If you're curious about GR's recent decision to censor reviews, to dictate what we are allowed to talk about, to delete at will any review that they decide is "off topic" or might "lower the tone of the site", please consider reading and reviewing this book.

It's available for free here or from Lulu for \$0.99. It provides a detailed account of the whole Goodreads censorship story, plus many of the reviews that Goodreads decided were a threat--oh, excuse me--were "off-topic." I think the book captures the multifaceted emotions of the uprising, from fury to disgust to disappointment to reasoned argument. The only aspect missing, in my opinion, is rather more external context and framing for the sections; for example, which of the included reviews were deleted by GR? I couldn't tell.

For me, the most despicable part of this whole thing is Goodreads' refusal to make a public announcement, to stand by their decisions, to behave with the decorum and honesty they apparently expect of us. To put it baldly, GR is lying to its users by omission. One could argue that many users might not care, or might even approve. But if GR itself believed that, why not be honest with users? The flat refusal to announce its actions and this hysterical attempt to stifle all protest, is, in itself, a tacit acknowledgement of wrongdoing.

I believe that the most crucial task is to ensure that as many users as possible are made aware of GR's actions. Again, you could argue that many might not care, but I passionately believe that **GR users deserve to know**. After all, I'm part of the multitude of low-profile and un-notified users. Nothing of mine was deleted, but that doesn't lessen my sense of betrayal. This book provides the perspective of some of those who were personally affected, as well as some of the most prominent, active, and well-respected reviewers on the site. (If you want GR's side, you can always check the weasel-worded messages on the GR Feedback group). By reviewing it, or even voting for it as a write-in in GR's book awards, you can help to raise awareness.

If you're like me and constitutionally unable to break rules, then think about reviewing this book. After all, I'm quite sure my review has remained on-topic.

Richard Derus says

*****2018 UPDATE*****Everyone now upset about the latest Authors Behaving Badly kerfuffle! Read this book. It's happened before and a lot of good Goodreaders vanished forever because of it. **DO NOT KID YOURSELF!** The issue will arise again and again, and you will always feel as though you've lost. Read on to find solace and comfort and some good ideas.

It's National Book Lovers Day! A day to bask in the amazing power of books to inform, amuse, educate, and

alter our views and viewpoints. And in light of our Brand New Redesign, this book is newly re-relevant. (That's an ugly locution but I can't think of a way to fix it.)

***Paperback edition now available from Amazon (ironically enough) in the US and UK!

UPDATE there was a major influx of sock puppets one-starring this book. Please, even if you hate seeing it, give the actual reviews a "like"

I'm rating others' contributions to the book, not my own.

If resistance is futile, like I've been told over and over again by people who're bored or impatient with protest reviews and continued commentary against being surveilled by the site owners here, then what exactly is the point of this book?

Resistance isn't futile. The Borg can't be beaten by force, so hide among them and trip them up.

Demand transparency. Okay, they're going to collect data, which is fancy talk for watch your ever mouseclick and cursor twitch. Demand to know what they're doing with the data, and what data they're collecting, and what criteria they're using to evaluate that data.

Being a citizen makes demands of you. Shirking them because it's not fun or it's boring means nothing except you'll get what you deserve...less and less.

Literary Ames {Against GR Censorship} says

**Cross-posted on Wordpress and BookLikes.*

Disclaimer: *I witnessed the production of this book from the sidelines.*

****Currently available from Lulu as a non-profit ebook or freely and legally download it [HERE](#) from my Dropbox account.***

This is a small collection of essays and reviews, some of which were deleted by Goodreads, on GR's censorship policy imposed on September 20th, 2013.

None of my articles, posted on my blog, were included as there were some legal issues over my screenshots, opinions and accusations e.g. calling them a 'badly behaving social network'.

Intelligent, witty, cheeky and bold, the various perspectives expound on the personal, literary, legal and technical implications of the opposed changes.

My favourite 5-star contributions were by:

Steph Sinclair (GR friend)

Ceridwen (GR friend)

Emma Sea

Ian Graye

Moonlight Reader (GR friend)
Emily May (GR follower)
Kelly

They informed, analyzed and challenged GR's decision to move towards censorship, and echoed my thoughts and feelings on the situation exactly.

Now for the criticisms.

OFF-TOPIC possesses a very narrow and biased focus, concentrating exclusively on Goodreads and its reviewers, and for the most part excludes dissenting points of view and the wider context of author opinions on the new policy, Amazon's censorship of self-published authors, and various retailers removing all ebooks by self-published authors while they weed out the excessively offensive and illegal works. These events were taking place concurrently during a 3-week period and one wonders if they're all interrelated.

Some contributors have authored several pieces within the book. They also happen to be the most popular reviewers on Goodreads, the most visible, so many will have previously read what's included here. It would've been nice if *OFF-TOPIC* contained a few more pieces submitted from less high profile Goodreads members to showcase variety and prove that this policy has an impact on everyone rather than the most prolific or active minority.

And while the majority of the pieces are thoughtful, well-written and entertaining, there is repetition and overlap in particular areas where my attention wandered. Considering the limited scope of subject area, this is to be expected.

I've tried to review this work fairly, in light of my obviously biased standpoint, evaluating *OFF-TOPIC* as I would any other non-fiction read.

I hope I've succeeded.

Nandakishore Varma says

This was Goodreads, once upon a time...

Then "Big Money" came into the picture

The management changed

This is what happened to the reviewers!

The site went to...

Of course, this meant war!

...and thus, G.R. Reader was born.

Edit to add: Revving up my rating to account for

suspected sock puppet activity from the enemy.

19/11/2013

Edit to add: Since the puppets seems to have disappeared,

I am bringing down my rating to the original four.

Petra Eggs says

I was talking to my goldfish yesterday. He said that I wasn't giving him enough fish food and that what there was had sunk to the bottom and tasted like shit. I said, well I know all about stinky fish, bottom feeders and how they can sink so low they just leave a bad taste in your mouth.

And no, this review is not off-topic at all, even though the book is Off-Topic.

Diane says

This is the 125th book I've read this year. Out of all those books, I declare this one to be the most passionate.

Since you're reading this on Goodreads, you are probably aware of the ongoing censorship battle with the site. This book is an excellent compilation of essays and reviews written by fellow Goodreaders who are upset by GR's abrupt policy changes and by its random deletions of posts that were deemed "off-topic" or relating to "author behavior." I described the deletions as random because one thing the book proves is that enforcement of the new policies was ad hoc, and that not all reviewers were treated the same.

Some of these pieces you may have already read when they popped up in your news feed. Several were new to me, and some even introduced me to marvelous new writers. (Hello, Arthur Graham!) My favorite essays were Emma Sea's "Why GR's New Review Rules are Censorship," Ceridwen's analysis of the initial deletions and her lovely afterword, everything by Manny and Mr. Graham, and Kelly's "One Foot Out the Door."

I, too, have been upset by the changes, but nothing I've said about it has been as clever or as well-written as many of the essays in this collection. If you care about the Goodreads community, if it has changed your life, as it has mine, you should read this book.

Update

The downvoting campaign on this book is pathetic. Just wanted to say that in print.

Manny says

Available in hyperlinked PDF form from this Lulu page for \$0.99. The Creative Commons license means you're legally allowed to make copies and share it with your friends.

For old-fashioned people who like real books, I hear rather specific rumors that a print version will soon be available.

A few things that keep coming up:

- You can now get free copies from several places. The book's home page gives you one link; if that doesn't work for some reason, just look at the other reviews and you'll soon find something.
 - Some people say it doesn't display well on a Kindle. If it helps, Acrobat, Chrome and Firefox all seem to work fine.
 - If you could let me know about any typos you might have found, I promise to pass them on to G.R. Reader. She's trying to clean up the manuscript as much as possible before releasing the print edition.
-

Someone is carrying out a downvoting campaign against *Off-Topic*. If you look at the one-star reviews, you'll see that most of them come from obvious sockpuppets; we've now got at least 60 of them. There is a discussion about it here. The books on the sockpuppets' shelves appear to suggest that the people behind them are linked to STGRB, but it's also possible that someone is trying to frame them.

Just for the hell of it, I tried adding some of my own sockpuppets to fight on the other side. You may want to check out the complicated lives of pro-off-topic-sockpuppet1 and his friends.

Goodreads have shown class by deleting the sockpuppets used in the downvoting campaign. Prooftopicsockpuppets 1-5 have responded by removing their ratings, but still remain. (Prooftopicsockpuppet1, in particular, is very proud of his review of *100 Sexy Women* and hopes that more people will read it). 6-15 have quietly committed suicide.

For people wondering why the book is no longer available on Lulu, G.R. Reader tells me that she received the following message yesterday from them:

Dear Account Holder:

We are in receipt of a claim that statements made in your book 14204524 and 14196616 "Off-Topic: The Story of an Internet Revolt" may infringe someone's privacy rights and/or be defamatory. We are not making a judgment as to the merits of this claim, but since a dispute exists, we must remove the book from availability through Lulu and its distribution channels. For more information on the terms and conditions of publishing through Lulu.com please review our Membership Agreement at <http://www.lulu.com/about/legal>.

Please let us know if we can be of any further assistance.

Regards,

Questionable Content Team

Lulu.com

Since no further details were provided, she was rather curious to know who had so taken exception to her book. She was consequently grateful to get a mail from a Goodreads friend this morning pointing her to this page.

How thoughtful of Mr. Carufel to tell the whole Internet about what he'd done!

Further update. Someone who knows more about publishing and trademark law than I do commented that they were very surprised by this story. As they point out:

Carufel's name is not a registered trademark (yes, I checked). Even if it was, you could refer to it. Otherwise, the media would never mention trademarked company names, like Coca Cola and Google. He can't copyright his name. How silly! I'm shocked he calls himself an author yet doesn't appear to understand trademarks or copyrights. I'm equally shocked that Lulu rips books down without at least doing an initial, brief investigation.

Curioser and curioser. Is it really the case that Lulu will pull any book in response to any complaint, no matter how obviously frivolous? One can see this leading to various kinds of problems for them. Or is there more to it? G.R. Reader has still not received any response to the query she sent Lulu, asking for clarification.

Off-Topic is now listed on Google Books! Though I was evidently not as quick as Mr. Carufel to discover this. It's nice to see that he's taking such an interest.

The print edition is now out. G.R. Reader has uploaded the PDF version to Goodreads, where it's available for free download from the book's homepage. The uploaded PDF is exactly the same as the print edition, except that the hyperlinks are live.

I just did a Google search on the title of this book and got a startling 104,000 hits. More famous than I'd expected!

My friend Geraldine R. Reader reminds me that the first anniversary of the publication of this book is coming up soon, and suggests that November 2 be henceforth celebrated as Off-Topic Day. I applaud this initiative, and am helping her prepare her off-topic review. We hope other people will join us.

[June 19, 2015]

Geraldine asks me to post the following mail, which she received earlier today:

Every weekday we pick one Creative Commons or free licensed ebook to promote. "Off Topic: The Story Of An Internet Revolt" is our selection for the today.

Unglue.it is a website dedicated to the development of sustainable funding and distribution for Creative Commons and other freely licensed books. We are compiling a comprehensive catalog of these books while offering authors and publishers new ways to make their efforts sustainable. We recently launched "Thanks for Ungluing" which lets creators ask readers for support for free works on our download link pages and from inside the books.

<https://unglue.it/work/143362/>

Thanks for using a Creative Commons license!

Eric Hellman
President, Gluejar.Inc.
Founder, Unglue.it <https://unglue.it/>
<http://go-to-hellman.blogspot.com/>
twitter: @gluejar

?Karlyn P? says

'Off-topic: The Story of an Internet Revolt' tells the story of the hours and days that followed Goodreads sudden and unannounced decision to purge hundreds of reviews, listopias, and shelves.

Goodreads is a popular online social media site that depends on free user-generated content and its community engagement features to attract sponsors who buy advertising and promotional packages. But in late September 2013 it made a gross misstep when it deliberately targeted and mishandled a specific list of user-generated content and assumed few would notice. In the end, their mishandling and its new censorship policy created a major uproar that broke the trust of thousands of its most dedicated content contributors, volunteer librarians, and community moderators.

Goodreads defended its new censorship position, and the sudden deletion of content that discussed an authors behavior, by citing that their policy had simply changed to help set an appropriate tone. But their lack of consideration with no prior notification to its 20 million users before they started the massive purge set off a firestorm of backlash and an internet revolt.

The revolt grew rapidly when it became clear that the policy was not being enforced with any sense of fairness, but instead with a heavily biased agenda to appease a small group of authors who were bending the ears of the Amazon executives. One person likened this event to 'Goodreads shooting mosquitoes with a shotgun'.

For many of its members, this was the day Goodreads quit being a site devoted to the readers.

Goodreads has since apologized for their haste in not notifying the impacted members first, as well as deleting innocuously named shelves that should have been safe. They promised to retrieve the deleted content so these members will have an opportunity to revise the content so it won't be considered objectionable. However, all comments attached to the reviews are lost for good. And as of six weeks later, no one has received any of their deleted content back.

Unfortunately, new reports of innocuously named shelves being deleted are still being heard. These deletions are allowed due to a provision in their policy that allows them to determine the 'intent behind the naming convention', and is based on their own limited scope of the situation. A lot of members compare this to 'mind reading', a faulty measure to determine anything with any true accuracy.

Many devoted members questioned if this policy change was needed. Goodreads always had a policy that removed truly offensive and abusive content on their site, as well as a strict rule against attacks on other members. The new policy was not about addressing abusive behavior or content, only about removing content that discusses objectionable behavior of the author, and which consumers might find as a reason not to buy the book. So why the change? Who will benefit from it?

When confronted with the conflicting interests between reader and author, Goodreads changed positions from 'error on the side of the reader' to 'error on the side of the sponsor'. This unfortunate move now brings a heavy bias toward the sponsors, leaving all content on the site into question. If Goodreads is now scrubbing content to appease the sponsors and ensure them their books will not be blacklisted based on their own lack of professionalism, how trustworthy are the reviews?

The staff at Goodreads decreed that all content which mentions an author in any negative tone will be deleted. Reviews, shelves, lists, status updates...etc. were all impacted. As of today, the only 'safe' place to discuss authors behavior is in the groups, but many members believe that is only a matter of time before they too become subject of this great content purge.

Goodreads is a social media site devoted to discussing all things books. And for many members, they believe an authors conduct, both pro and con, is a fair and reasonable part of that discussion. However, under the

new policy Goodreads is trying to silence any 'negative' part of that discussion, and will punish members who do not comply by deleting their content and letting them know their membership will be under review for termination if they continue.

To understand the impact of this censorship policy, imagine if Goodreads was a site about politics. This would mean its members couldn't discuss Anthony Weiner's sexting scandal, only his politics. If this was a site about restaurants they would not be able to discuss the infamous anti-gay tweet by Dan Cathy, president of Chick-fil-A, only his menu items. And so on and so on.

So what does this mean for Goodreads member? Authors who are convicted child abusers, who orchestrated mass murder genocide (yes, anti Hitler reviews were removed!), who repeatedly attacked reviewers, who shamelessly gamed the system for a quick buck, who publicly doxxed and outed reviewers identities in hopes of a rebellious attack on their personal lives...etc. ARE NOW ABLE TO HIDE THEIR MISDEEDS on Goodreads.

Buyers should be forewarned about such authors, but you will not find that pertinent discussion allowed here on Goodreads.

This book sheds a lot of light on the actual events of the purge, and provides a lot of details about what Goodreads doesn't want you to see.

Nataliya says

The memory of the Internet is fickle, and its attention span is that of a goldfish. It's way too easy to get distracted by the next big thing, and the next, and the next.

But some things should not be forgotten. Because no matter how trivial they may seem to some, to others they are infused with meaning and importance. Because some of us care, and that's enough.

If you have been around Goodreads for the last couple of months or so, you have probably heard of the Great Goodreads Censorship Debacle. The brief summary: The Powers That Be decided that the way to foster proper community sense was to arbitrarily delete members' content that offended the sensibilities of certain authors; vocal and passionate members - many of whom are basically Who's Who of GR and have made this site into the vibrant community it became - protested; another wave of deletion swept through focusing now on the 'off-topic' reviews; and some of the disappointed members are leaving the site, feeling betrayed by those wielding power.

And some would say the problem started a bit earlier, when the once independent site was bought by a corporate giant, and those without rose-tinted glasses began anticipating the change that was to come once this site stopped being a huge virtual book club made for readers by readers and became just a site for product reviews, data mining and a place for targeted marketing. And naturally, when the site started alienating its core reviewers, the aforementioned pessimists appeared to actually be on to something.

I'm ashamed to say, I wasn't a part of the passionate protest. I can try blaming it on the long stressful hours at work combined with my natural apathy that I disguise as pacifism. But part of it was just me being stunned by the development and thinking (for way longer than it actually made sense) that at some point GR powers

would come to their senses and stop the ridiculousness. (I did give my votes to the now deleted reviews, that much I did). I wish I had done more, as little of a difference as it would have made.

And now, as things appear to be settling down, I can't help but think that GR landscape will never be the same. Yes, for every one person who left GR or decreased their presence to a minimum there are many more that stayed - but it does not magically erase the void left by those who are no longer here, and nothing will - at least for me - erase the bitter taste of disappointment and give me back the happy trust I had in this community before all this happened. It will not give any one of us back the happy feeling of a giant playground where we could be free and safe.

Because it's no longer just the happy shiny place of passionate ramblings and exchanging of ideas, the place where truth could be borne out of spirited arguments and never-ending discussions. It has been tainted by the spirit of commercialism, the dreaded idea of literature being the product that needs to be 'properly' marketed and 'properly' reviewed, and it hurts me to think so. Because our reading community cannot be reduced to consumers just waiting to be the target of marketing. God, how much do I hate the word 'consumer'! I want to be a reader, a thinker, a polemist, a debater, a philosopher of sorts - but not just a consumer, not just a data point, not just a drone in the corporate system. Too bad it's too idealistic for the present-day society - and that, sadly, includes this site.

I have made the decision - I am NOT leaving Goodreads. I love it too much. I love the community that is still here, and an unashamed optimist in me hopes that it will survive. And yet I miss the friends who left or almost left. And I feel sad that so many of us have found alternate homes elsewhere on the net, even if those homes are for now there 'just in case'. And I don't like this bitter taste the situation left me with, or even the fact that I feel I have to have a backup place to run to if this site becomes little else but a product review site for a corporate giant, with 'helpful', always on-topic, and useless 'reviews', having alienated those who have made it what it is. And, reading this collection of reviews and thoughts compiled by my friends and people I respect, I feel the same emotion - sadness as something that was so wonderful is changing and going away.

I miss you, people who are no longer here. I miss you, old Goodreads. Maybe this community will just scar from the loss and will eventually heal. My inner optimist really really hopes so.

*"In time, in time they tell me, I'll not feel so bad. I don't want time to heal me. There's a reason I'm like this. I want time to set me ugly and knotted with loss of you, marking me. I won't smooth you away.
I can't say goodbye."
? China Miéville, The Scar*

s.penkevich says

Goodreads has always been my happy place, my little haven from life. I joined it when working in a factory 70hrs a week because I missed writing essays for school, and without the website and the great friends I met here, I would have lost my damn mind working brain-numbing jobs for endless hours. Plus it's nice to get something other than laughed at for reading books like Gravity's Rainbow on your smoke break (I got yelled at and threatened a pay cut for reading Steinbeck at work once. Because it was spreading 'liberal propaganda' and I was 'lucky I wasn't escorted out in cuffs'. That's how they roll in Grand Rapids, Michigan.)

Then Amazon ruined everything and my happy place became a war zone. I have recently been unable to be on as much as I would like, and coming back after a bit of a hiatus to discover Goodreads fraught with censorship and anger was like in that trippy 70's Puff the Magic Dragon cartoon where Puff returns to find Honalee decimated.

Or perhaps it was like some terrifying cold war film. Either way, Goodreads was in sad state. Then the goodreaders stood up, stood strong, stood together, and stood toe to toe with Amazon to make sure they would not be silenced, would not be driven out into the night to disappear into the darkness like the wife in McCarthy's *The Road*. It is an on-going battle, but one that shows that human beings are strong, powerful, and that good can live on.

Steinbeck would be so proud. Steinbeck would write books about Manny Rayner.

It makes me proud to be friends with all of you, thank you for defending my happy place.

However, it still infuriates me enough to write this review that there are those that wish to censor the good folks at goodreads. <http://www.stopthebullies.com/>, for example, wishes to silence goodreaders, and spews hate and their own ironic style of bullying at those who would stand against censorship. They even declined to post/respond to my lengthy email to them about how ironic their opinions and actions are. But oh well, they suck. It just frustrates me to see mediocrity supported by this censorship, that is it more important to defend unknown authors than to allow people to voice an opinion. Amazon would rather see you buy books then write or think about them. These authors aren't the next James Joyce, and many of these authors have treated goodreaders poorly enough that it is hard to feel bad for them. This is stiff-arming an opinion, and I understand there are two sides to every story, but really, censorship is never the answer. Goodreads is, and always can be, a wonderful place if we just treat each other like decent human beings and remember to love with an open mind, not hate with a delete button.

At a time when I've been feeling pretty ugly about the world and humanity, my goodreads friends have been a beacon of hope that reminds me that this world really is a great place and one worth fighting for. Thanks everyone.
