# A Million Penguins Research Report

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## Introduction

In February 2007, Penguin Books and De Montfort University launched "A Million Penguins," a collaborative novel open to anyone who wanted to help write it. The novel was to be created on MediaWiki, the same software as Wikipedia, with a similar ethos of collective authoring but the added spice of a risky experiment in the heartland of commercial publishing. "Can a community write a novel?" asked Penguin Digital Publisher Jeremy Ettinghausen. "Let's find out…"[1]

Seeded with a first line taken from a volume in the Penguin Classics series, the wiki invited contributions over a five week period. The result may not have been a novel as we know it, but it certainly produced a community of collaborators who created what John Mackinson, the Chief Executive of Penguin Books, called "not the most read, but possibly the most written novel in history."[2] The Penguin wikinovel, as it came to be known, touched a nerve in many quarters of the literary world and provoked great excitement in the social media community. The level of reaction in the media and across the web showed that there was a real interest in the project despite the fact that many critics dismissed it as a "PR stunt"[3] "badly written"[4] or, in the words of Jordan Jack writing in the Yale Herald "the worst book I've ever read."[5] *Linux.com* solicited the views of Douglas Rushkoff, and the Internet guru was not optimistic:

> *"A Million Penguins* looks like fun, but it's still likely to remain more a million penguins than a cohesive or coherent bird," says Rushkoff, who points out that every book needs its author.[6]

Other commentators suggested that the wiki was likely to be a failure, albeit a "delightful" one.[7] It was certainly unorthodox. The authors who came together were not the usual writerly stereotypes scribbling away alone in attics, but an intriguing mix of 'gardeners' intent on nurturing the novel; 'vandals' determined to ruin it, and 'performers' hoping to make it showcase for their talents. What they created together turned out to be quite unique.

Later Ettinghausen would blog: "as the project evolved I think I stopped thinking about it as a literary experiment and started thinking about it more as a social experiment.".[8] A year on, he now says "it's the best thing I've ever done … but I would never do it again."[9]

## Research Framework

This report focuses on some of the social behaviours that occurred during the time the wiki novel was live and attempts to understand them within the context of wiki culture. The research focused on two questions: what was the role of the discussion around the writing, and what patterns of social behaviour occurred among the contributors? Framing the research questions in this way allowed us to approach "A Million Penguins" as a cultural text and, inevitably, led us to critique the question underlying the wikinovel experiment – "can a community write a novel?"

The social behaviour of the contributors was tracked through analysing their communication in the wiki novel, their discussions in associated blogs and, where possible, through direct contacts. The results showed a complex set of interactions and understandings that questioned many of the assumptions about the experiment in specific and wiki sites in general. Much of the media commentary about "A Million Penguins" – as excerpted above and explored in more detail later – treated the project as a failure because no community was seen to form and no recognisable novel was written. The research indicates, however, that many of the commentaries show a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of the processes behind the wikinovel and of the final product itself. Close analysis of what people wrote, where, when and how they wrote it has persuaded us that we need to look to a tradition of artistic performance that is very different to the printed novel. To do this we will draw upon the idea of the carnival as espoused by Russian philosopher, Mikhail Bakhtin.

## Wikipedia

People who don't know what a wiki is still know of Wikipedia. It is routinely listed in the top ten most visited sites on the Internet. Currently, it contains 2,321,943 articles; users have made 214,497,975 edits since July 2002 and there are 6,835,839 registered user accounts. Wikipedia is both the example against which all other wikis are judged and, by virtue of its size, a completely atypical wiki. There is nothing else like Wikipedia.
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page)

According to Bakhtin, a folk carnival provides a lens for the analysis of culture, language and narrative. It is our contention that the way the wiki novel was set up implicitly framed the setting as a virtual place in which a carnival could occur. Like a carnival, the wiki was bounded in space and time and provided an opportunity for 'ordinary folk' to hold a barely controllable party. Unlike a wiki, which is meant to evolve 'organically' through multiple edits in such a way that no one 'voice' dominates, a carnival is a moment of excess featuring multiple competing voices and performances. Indeed, the activities we uncovered in "A Million Penguins" challenged the 'garden' metaphor so widely used to characterise behaviour in wikis. According to this metaphor, a wiki grows successfully when it is properly seeded with content and tended by gardeners. The wiki novel was in no way a neat, orderly wiki and, as we'll see, many of the norms of wiki behaviour and aesthetics were turned on their head in "A Million Penguins."

The interpretation of this work leads us to suggest that the wiki novel was neither a wiki nor a novel as the terms are commonly understood. We will argue that critics of the experiment who bemoan its failures as wiki, novel or both are misunderstanding the kind of text that it actually is. To do this we will tell the story of the experiment by looking at the stories and the people behind them, and explain how Bakhtin's notion of carnival provides a way to interpret "A Million Penguins" which opens up further avenues of exploration for this unique cultural text.

# The Experiment

It could be argued that a wiki is what Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the web, always wanted the web to be. Fast, simple and dynamic, it provides a collaborative means of knowledge building, sharing and representation.

At its simplest a wiki is a web page that users can edit as well as view. The first successful example of a wiki webpage was made by Ward Cunningham on March 25th, 1995. He named it the "WikiWikiWeb" after the Hawaiian word for quick: "wiki wiki."[10] The subject of his wiki was focused on the discussion and elicitation of patterns of collaboration in software development, and it still exists today.[11] He described it as "[t]he simplest online database that could possibly work,"[12] and WikiWikiWeb remains enormously influential both as a trail-blazing piece of technology as well as a source of information about patterns of behaviour in wikis.

Cunningham's notion of the wiki is fundamentally linked with the concept of open source development. He posited several design principles that should govern any wiki, all of which are grounded in the belief that if multiple people collaborate over time in an open system in which both

the text and the organisation of the text can be freely changed then self-organising patterns would arise.[13] This belief has driven the development of wikis ever since. Most notably, the wiki software, UseMod Wiki, was adapted to run the original version of Wikipedia.

The most famous of all wikis, Wikipedia was originally created through the use of UseMod wiki software, although the software was later rewritten and spun off into a standalone open source wiki platform: MediaWiki. The success of Wikipedia allied to the open source nature of the software has meant that MediaWiki has become an extremely popular wiki tool in its own right. So, when Penguin Books came to select the wiki software for "A Million Penguins" MediaWiki was the obvious choice.

## Wiki Editing

In a wiki everything about you can be seen in the way you edit. The editing process is simple to do, but conceptually very difficult to grasp until you have tried it. Essentially, anyone can edit anything you write and you can edit anything that they write. That means your text can be revised, improved, deleted or rephrased at any time, and that you can do the same. The element of the wiki that keeps this together is the History page, where all previous edits can be seen and which can be used to revert to earlier versions. So whilst anything can be deleted, nothing can ever be lost.

Penguin's goal was to explore the potential for innovative collaborative online fiction. They invited new media author Kate Pullinger and Professor of New Media Sue Thomas, along with their students on the MA in Creative Writing and New Media at De Montfort University, Leicester, to help design and manage the experiment. At a meeting at DMU's Institute of Creative Technologies in November 2006, it was agreed that Penguin would provide technical resources plus two editors: digital publisher Jeremy Ettinghausen, and his literary editor colleague Jon Elek. Elek was more accustomed to working with authors such as Will Self and had relatively little experience of new media. The DMU team would provide consultation during development and oversee day-today operations, and  was led by Kate Pullinger supported by Sue Thomas, working with Masters students Toni Le Busque, Jo Howard, Alison Norrington, Kirsty McGill, Chris Meade and Chrstine Wilks.[14]

During the planning phase the team discussed issues like what might be the best structure for the novel, and how to limit undesirable behaviour including the possibility that people might upload whole chunks of their own unpublished works. They considered creating a complex set of rules such as setting a quota of 250 words per person per day. But such constraints are anathema to the spirit of the wiki, and the team knew that however well they planned beforehand, they must be prepared to be highly responsive and flexible once the project was live. The best they could do was expect the unexpected.

The wiki was opened to the public on Thursday February 1st 2006 with a line from Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* "There was no possibility of taking a walk that day."[15]  It soon became evident that there would be little possibility of respite for the team over the coming weekend. Almost immediately, visits from interested surfers worldwide  overwhelmed the server and by Friday morning the website had gone down. People were already wondering whether Penguin had succumbed to 'wiki-fear' evidenced in June 2005  when the Los Angeles Times opened a wiki editorial (a "wikitorial") for only one afternoon before closing it down for good in the face of lethal amounts of vandalism.[16] But Ettinghausen and the team did not lose their nerve, and by lunchtime on Friday the wiki was back, moved to a larger host machine and ready for further onslaughts from eager writers. The project team organised itself to work around the clock

## Initial expectations

 "Initially, Penguin hoped that they might get a publishable print book out of the wikinovel project.  However, they hadn't completely taken into account the nature of wiki software in that most successful wikis are absolutely dependant upon a complex series of interwoven links and these links are impossible to reproduce in print.  While the DMU team was sceptical from the outset about the possibility of a print book being created through 'A Million Penguins', the team underestimated the fact that clearly many of the participants didn't understand what a wiki was either, in terms of the creation and development of so many unlinked pages." Kate Pullinger

across the weekend to keep on top of the furious rate of changes, vandalism and spam. Their private email discussions of that time illustrate their acute anxiety about their ability to succeed, with numerous concerns about lack of sleep and the physical exhaustion of keeping up with the job of policing so many edits. By Monday the team had instituted a nightly "lock down" period providing much-needed breathing space to purge the novel of its daily accumulation of spam and pornography. On February 8th, Kate Pullinger wrote in the team blog "[t]here's a wiki-storm raging at http://www.amillionpenguins.com and we've been battening down the hatches, chopping down broken branches, and hammering plywood across the French doors, so to speak."[17]

On the same day Toni Le Busque posted "The first few days I would log on and drop my head into my hands in despair,"[18] and Jo Howard added, "I've had a similar experience of rage and despair,"[19] Alison Norrington found the experience "frustrating and yet frenetic, addictive whilst also extremely annoying."[20]

With time, however, the initial rush slowed down and the growth became steady and more sustained. By the time the wiki was finally closed to contributions on 7th March 2007, at least 75,000 different people had viewed the site.[21] Of those, 1,476 people had registered as user and had between them made over 11,000 edits to its 1,000 plus pages.

## Spammers, hackers and wikicitizens

Wiki research has uncovered several types of behaviour in wikis.[22] Some contributors become good "wikicitizens" interested in developing and expanding the work. They may disagree with each other about the details and occasionally behave badly while so doing, but they share a common purpose. Others are thought of as vandals or "trolls," interested in disrupting, maybe even destroying, the wiki. In addition, the site may be invaded by spammers trying to sell their wares or hackers looking to use the web page to infect careless users with malevolent software. When looking at the contributors to "A Million Penguins" the spammers and hackers need to be filtered out as they were really just part of the context in which the site existed.

To examine the types of more general behaviour on "A Million Penguins" various questions need to be asked. How frequently did people edit? Which bits of the wiki did they edit and what does that tell us about them? What kinds of edit did they perform? For example, did they add new text to the novel, focus on editing the text of others or on organising the content? Did they try to promote their text or were they interested in more collaborative authoring?

And who were these self-appointed writers? Why did they work so hard on this very anarchic experiment? It's easy to remain anonymous on a wiki and there is no way to identify or contact people who wish to conceal their identities, so although it was possible to contact a few of the participants for the purposes of this report, most remain shrouded in mystery. For the most part, we must read their characters and writerly intentions through the work itself.

### History in a wiki

The wiki software saves every edit ever made in a history file which tracks the development of a page over time. The history file functions like a gigantic "track changes" and can be used to compare different versions of the page to each other. A user can even "revert" a page to a previous version. This does not "undo" anything, but makes a copy of the selected page and turns it into the newest version of the page. An extended example showing a page's edit history can be found in Appendix I.

## Pabruce – the performer

Pabruce was the most frequent editor of the wiki. With 1,780 edits starting from the day after the wiki went live to the very last moments, he was a major force in "A Million Penguins." His final update to his user page reads "had a wonderful time. The bull has left the china closet,"[23] and this exemplifies his dramatic self-portrayal. Pabruce was a performer and he saw his role as precisely that. In one of his final edits he wrote in Sentinel68's user page, "I started out butting heads with you in the first weeks, simply because I am a Leo, and we like to have our way all the time (grin)…."[24]

Pabruce frequently edited talk:Welcome, the main discussion forum making 64 edits in all. Once he discovered the page on February 7th he made nearly 90% of all the subsequent edits to it, turning the page into his own fiefdom. His first edit was to suggest some alternate first lines and he built from there, adding content throughout the page. Although he did edit text and perform other types of gardening, he preferentially focused on editing the text that he had created and moulding the novel to fit the shape he preferred.

Pabruce's first edit of the novel is emblematic of his style. He jumped right into the main page, taking a passage which had already become central and adding his own twist to it.

| Before | Pabruce's edit |
| --- | --- |
| I could feel it dancing across my skin: the electricity in the air made the hairs on the back of my neck stand on end. I anticipated the roar of thunderous claps followed by the intense light show. Above, the storm had… | My skin crawled as the strychnine kicked in and the acid slowly crept up my spine. Was I ready for eight more hours of this? Harold used to talk about making the grass grow into monsters, or the songs ice crystals made at midnight, but this was normal for me. As normal as anything could be. HA! I could feel it dancing across my skin. Electricity. The very air made the hairs on the back of my neck stand on end. Now I had only to anticipate the roar of thunder that always followed the laser show. Above, the storm had… |

From this intervention onwards, strychnine and various re-workings of it became a central motif in the wiki novel,[25] and Pabruce became an instantly recognisable voice. Although there was supposed to be an ethos of "leaving your ego at the door" it was always obvious when some text had been added or altered by Pabruce. Just in case it wasn't obvious, he used his user page to track what he was responsible for.

> My main contributions were:[26]
> to create the first list of Characters in Order of Appearance
> to first create hyperlink on all the characters throughout the novel (at least at one point in time ... it is HARD to keep up!)
> to create the list currently titled, Alternative Versions of the Novel.
> I introduced strychnine to the novel and added the first hyperlink notes there.[27]

The side-effect of this was that not everyone approved. Sentinel68, in particular had some altercations with him and on the 13th February another contributor wrote a version of Pabruce into the wiki novel, effectively turning an active contributor into just another wiki character. This action outraged the real Pabruce so much that he publically "left" the wiki novel, writing,

> Okay you win, I just deleted everything I can find that I edited into this novel. Going to my myspace page and entering a thinly veiled version of my real name INTO the novel is too weird. Get this, I am out of here. If you persist I will report you, it is too much like stalking.[28]

Pabruce's outburst was one of the crisis points for the wiki novel. As soon as the editorial team became aware of the problem, they met using the instant messaging service, Skype. At that point it wasn't clear whether this was a case of deliberately staged drama, an overreaction caused by the overheated atmosphere or something more damaging. One of the team commented that "They are really hav[ing] a wiki war, like in wikipedia - very very serious!" however another noticed that Pabruce had not brought the issue to their attention but had dealt with it himself, causing them to wonder whether they should intervene at all or just ride it out. They had already noted the difficulties between

Pabruce and Sentinel68 and Sentinel68 had also been flagged as an individual who seemed far too ready to delete material.[29] Should they consider banning him? Come to that, did he even exist? At least one of the editors suspected that Pabruce and Sentinel68 were one and the same person acting out a drama. In the end the team decided to watch the unfolding events closely but not intervene. If this was a staged performance than banning someone would possibly be playing right into the drama. On the other hand, if Pabruce's real personal details had indeed been posted there was the possibility of the events leading to all manner of distress and accusation. As it turned out, the decision not to intervene at all turned out to be the right one and events settled down again of their own accord.

Pabruce disappeared for a couple of days but soon he was back. On the 15th and 19th of February he made two edits to his and another person's user page and then on February 22nd, he returned to the wiki in earnest creating a new page for a character called Lewis Oswald,[30] and contributing another 665 edits before the wiki closed. After his return his behaviour was much more low key and it is noteworthy that he made around half of the number of the edits after he returned as he did before he left. Clearly the experience of seeing himself re-invented as a character within the story he was himself involved in creating had left its mark.

## Choose your own performance

Pabruce was not the only performer in town. Nostrum19[31] provides another example of dramatic interventions into the wikinovel that massively influenced the novel. As with Pabruce, Nostrum19's first edits were on February 3rd, and consisted of significant contributions to the "Welcome" page where he renamed characters, and removed some of the whimsy that had been edited into the story in order to return the story to a more Noir-based style. Showing complete confidence in his own judgement, he started at line 1 of the story and made a pass through it. At the same time he added comments to K1's user talk page.

> You need to quit strong-arming the story to fit some preconceived notion. You are an ass, and your editing (no butchering) really stinks.[32]

Unlike Pabruce, Nostrum19 seemed to have a strong belief in a collaborative editing ethos but like Pabruce he was happy to make his views known both in the Talk:Welcome page and in user's pages. Here he berates a user called Djjansen for deletions

> I don't like your strong arm tactics. You shouldn't just delete other people's contributions

### Being banned

Block log ▾ User: [        ] Title: User:Brutalhelm [Go]

View (previous 50) (next 50) (20 | 50 | 100 | 250 | 500).

- 07:33, 6 February 2007 Admin (Talk | contribs) blocked "Brutalhelm (contribs)" with an expiry time of 3 months *(vandalism)*

The ultimate sanction that the editorial team had was to ban users. Because anyone who wanted to edit the wiki had to register it was possible to use the history file for a page to determine who had made the offending edits and then ban him or her. A banned user could still read the wiki but could not edit it. A user could be banned for a variety of reasons such as posting copyrighted material, spamming, vandalism (e.g. deleting pages), obscenity or verbal attacks. Only the Penguin staff had the power to ban and they never used it lightly. See the "Ethical Guidelines" page on "A Million Penguins" for more details.

> wholesale.[33]

One of the other frequent contributors in the early days, Kate Fynn, accused Nostrum19 of a similar failing. Writing in Nostrum19's user page on February 5th, Kate turns Nostrum19's words against him in an echo of his own message, much as Pabruce was invented as a character by another user in the endless hall of mirrors which copy-and-paste can produce:

> I don't like your Armstrong tactics. You shouldn't just take of your shirt and flex your bulging muscles just to prove a point.[34]

After his early edits, Nostrum19 focused on "choose your own…" stories.[35] The idea had first been mooted by a user called Nicholasjh in the Talk:Welcome Page where he suggested that

> I think the Admin should look at making this a choose your own adventure. With the abilities of Wiki, you could even start out picking a Genre, ie. Contemporary fiction, sci fi, fantasy, horror, contemporary fantasy, etc, and the wiki would take you to that book.[36]

Nicholasjh had created a page called "sci-fi" which had clearly been meant to be a sci-fi choose your own adventure story but instead other users alternated between edits that parodied the formula or simply replaced it with their idea of a sci-fi piece. Nostrum19 found the page and took over, working on quite a complex hyperlinked set of pages and adding in his own interests to do with brain implants and genetic conspiracies. This work inspired a lot of interest and seems to have motivated quite a few contributors to try their hand at the "choose your own…" formula with some of the work becoming quite highly regarded. Kate Pullinger described one such story aimed at women as "brilliant"[37] while another of the team, Toni Le Busque, wrote in the project team's blog that

> I usually have a quick look around the front page and then go straight to where I know I will find something smoother, less violent.
> Bit like when you go to a club, you have to go through all those ruffians at the front door and find a place up the back somewhere on a sofa with your mates.
> I find that in the "Choose your own" section.[38]

Nostrum19 acting as a performer drew both praise and attack, and inspired many pages in the wiki. He also attempted to create a sense of a community by using his user page to draw attention to the work of others as well as himself.

> Hi. I like my writing, but I like collaboration even better, so edit it. I've worked a lot on the Sc-Fi novel, so add to it. please! Here are some other good writers you should check out. I've just stumbled upon some of their stuff and liked what I saw: User:Random guy, User:Sentinel68, User:Nicholasjh, User:Jhoward[39]



Pabruce, Nostrum19 et al used the wiki as a stage on which to perform. They may have fallen out with others and had very specific ideas about where to take the wiki novel but they all shared an ethos of improving "A Million Penguins." Not every performer had such benign intentions.

## YellowBanana – genius, vandal or troll?

The problem with YellowBanana[40] was that nobody knew whether to take him seriously.[41] Was this person a vandal to be blocked, a pest to be ignored or a source of creative play with the wiki? Although by no means the most frequent contributor to the wiki – making 166 edits – he gained significant attention beyond the confines of the wiki due to his "banana-isation" of "A Million Penguins."

YellowBanana made his entrance on February 13th at which point he performed 22 edits to different pages over a period of 25 minutes. The particular target of his ire appears to have been a section on the Welcome Page called "Gestalt:" an attempt at reflecting on the process of writing in the wiki novel. For example, YellowBanana deleted the concluding lines and replaced them with "My long-winded diatribe is over - if you still have the will to live, continue reading..." Similarly the line "I am one of "the million penguins" and they are we," had the sentence "I like to talk in a way which sound smeaningful[sic], when I am really saying nothing," added to the end. YellowBanana titled their edit "(garr.. kill me now!)" to indicate their response to the edited passage.[42]

| Before | After |
|--------|-------|
| *You do not know me.*<br><br>*"My" name is not attached*<br>*it is born of a million syllables*<br>*and floats like astronauts*<br><br>*read on...* | My long-winded diatribe is over - if you still have the will to live, continue reading... |

This initial edit is important for what it tells about YellowBanana's response to the wiki; he seems to have seen it as pompous and long-winded and, therefore, set out to challenge this through ridicule. YellowBanana was not, however, a simply destructive force. Over the next 25 minutes he refined the "Gestalt" section through a quite complex set of actions. First he created a new page called "here"[43] and used it to store all the text in Gestalt then he replaced all of the text in Gestalt with the text:

> You do not know me. Unless you do, in which case ignore this. Actually, you are better of ignoring it - if you are really desperate, you can view my long-winded diatribe where I try and sound meaningful here.[44]

The link goes to the "here" page that YellowBanana had just created. In this case, YellowBanana appears to be trying to remove something that he regarded as bad writing while keeping it available on another page; arguably good wiki practice. However, at the same time as doing this, he was also adding the word "smeg" into instances of "id/ego" and creating a new page called "id/ego/smeg" with nothing but the text "smeg, smeg, smeg!!"[45]

YellowBanana had also spotted that Sentinel68 was a major contributor; indeed Sentinel68 was editing the "Welcome" page at the same time as YellowBanana. So, he edited Sentinel68's user page.

| Before | After |
|--------|-------|
| Hi everyone, my name is sentinel. Here are some principles I am trying to follow<br><br>1. as far as possible, try to keep other's work in the text and as intact as possible. | Hi everyone, my name is sentinel. Here are some principles I am trying to follow<br><br>1. as far as possible, try to insert the word 'smegma' into the text at random. |

These early edits show YellowBanana to be an extremely competent and confident wiki editor who is being destructive yet being destructive with a purpose.

YellowBanana gained his notoriety, however, by replacing emerging motifs in the novel with bananas. It started during his second set of edits to the wiki. From 9:46pm February 13 (GMT) YellowBanana made 26 edits up to 2:20am the next morning and began inserting bananas. First he added a sub-section to a page which was, at that time, section 4 of the "main" novel. Titling it "Get Bent," the passage started:

> The banana was yellow and bent. He had expected it to be bent, for most banana were, but it was the way it was bent that was surprising. The banana was bent into the shape of male genitali.[46]

Over the next few hours, YellowBanana developed this section further and began to insert bananas in places designed to gain maximum attention. Like Pabruce, YellowBanana was engaged in performance that was supposed to draw attention to itself.

The problem for the overseeing editorial team was that it wasn't clear whether or not YellowBanana's edits constituted vandalism. In the spirit of the project, Jeremy Ettinghausen blogged about the dilemma, asking

> "Should we ban him/her (permanently, or just for a few days?) or celebrate the infusion of fruity fun into this project? Basically does this gag have apeel, or have you all had a skinfull of bananaman's monkeying about?"[47]

The entry gained 25 responses that on the whole argued for the user not to be banned. A commenter called "M" writes

> I would let the Banana man (Eric perchance?) have his day. Art and vandalism can be different viewpoints on the same object. Just our associations and feelings change depending on the value we place on the (banana) source.[48]

Writepen9 has a similar opinion.

> Personally, I'd vote for the Banana king to be kept in the fold.
> To enforce a ban would be to admit there is a hierarchy among the contributors. It is
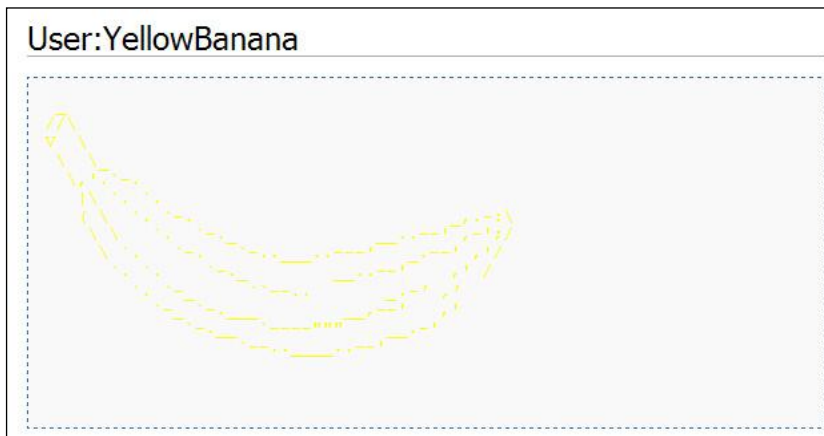


> a common enough charactersitic to assume ownership, based on a randomly selected (and self-serving) criteria (ref JohnH's comment about being active since "day one").[49]

Perhaps somewhat ironically after all the calls to allow him to stay, YellowBanana had only six editing sessions between February 13th to February 19th then disappeared from the wiki not to return until March 5th when he restarted reinserting bananas and banana references.

| Before | After banana-isation |
|--------|----------------------|
| Carlo's hallucinations were now at fever pitch. Reality and imagination, his writing and his characters were blending into a clump of madness.... | "Tomorrow is here", he thought to himself, nodding meaningfully. He often thought such deep thoughts after smoking dried banana peel. He checked his stash - he had plenty left. He breathed deeply, letting the banana-scented smoke fill his lungs. He begun to hallucinate, bananans with legs running across his vision, chasing each other, squealing madly. Reality and imagination, his writing and his characters were blending into a clump of madness....[50] |

He performed two large editing sessions on March 5th and 6th but it is noteworthy that this time other contributors gave as good as they got. Hight sabotaged YellowBanana's user:talk page[51] whilst Pabruce and Sentinel68 reverted or edited YellowBanana's text as they saw fit. In the end, it could be argued, the crowd co-opted YellowBanana by creating a separate version of the novel – "the banana version"[52] into which most of the banana references could be put.

In many ways YellowBanana subverted and ridiculed their reprisals while, simultaneously, strengthening them. In a measure as close to "official" approval as one could get, the instigator of the project, Jeremy Ettinghausen, rescued YellowBanana's user page from attack by other contributors. YellowBanana had replaced the text on their user page with four ASCII art versions of a yellow banana. On March 5th, BigTony had reverted this piece of artwork only for Ettinghausen to undo the

reversion.[53] Perhaps somewhat ironically, Jeremy Ettinghausen ended up saving YellowBanana's ASCII art banana.

## Other vandals

The user Assassinyin provides an excellent example of the difficulty in simply labelling user types. Assassinyin conducted 12 edits in two different sittings; one lot of 5 edits in an hour on February 5th, and another lot of 7 edits on February 14th.[54] As was common with vandals, Assassinyin only contributed to popular pages and most of the edits were on the level of childishly altering words. Their first edit was to the "Welcome" page and consisted of changing the sentence "He was thinking about Richard Wagner," to He was "thinking about Fucking Richard Wagner."[55] However not all of their edits were so asinine. Some were relatively neutral such as changing the name of Chad Thompson to Brad Thompson[56] or changing the word "fellas" to "fellow"[57] which was, arguably, a minor improvement.

Other vandals were more obviously destructive and were usually banned as soon they were noticed. For example, Brutalhelm, made one edit which was to delete all the content on the "welcome" page. This was quickly undone and then the user was banned.[58] Another user, CarlGriffith had made 35 edits over two sittings on February 14th and 15th before being banned for continual obscenity.[59] Like YellowBanana, CarlGriffith appears to have been motivated by what he portrayed as a distaste for the project and its users and a need to make that feeling known. This was made obvious by his addition of the section "i'm here , i'm here, notice me" to Talk:Welcome.

> just a quick comment I've only just found this place, i must say i've had loads of fun playing around with all your work! i've loved every minute of it in fact a can hardly sleep, the chance to be so infantile and puerile with all your "head up your own arses" arty fart crap just makes my ( like yours) sad little life all worth while, so please none of you give up i need you all! oh and if anyone sees a very slight homo erotic feel to my edits its all in your own repressed sexuality, not my work! i'm straight mate are you 100% sure??[60]

For all the destructive nature of their edits, these vandals were responsible for a large number of edits to the wiki and clearly affected the structure, content and tone of the story. Their performances may have often been unsavoury but they were very much a part of the event. They also posed various dilemmas for the editorial team who had to choose when to intervene, and offered many chances for critics of the project to say "I told you so." Many of the contributors to the wiki novel were, however, less interested in creating a performance. They wished to improve "A Million Penguins" and seem to have seen their role as one in which they facilitated the project. It is to one such person that we turn next.

# Sentinel68 – the gardener

With 1,114 edits Sentinel68 was the second most prolific contributor to "A Million Penguins," this despite the fact that he didn't start editing until February 7th, at which point the wiki novel had already been live for a week.[61] From the time he made his first edit, there was not a day went by where he failed to edit something. Throughout this huge effort he concentrated on one thing; creating order. His first edit was to the talk page for "section 2" where he added the text:

> My first reading of the text of this fascinating project is there seems to be a heap of opening chapters and one or two ending chapters (or is that epilogues). I was thinking it might have been more helpful if, even allowing for twists and irony, that we could build upon each other's earlier chapters and take our cues from what the prior chapter has set up, rather than a heap of new "jumping off points." I also wonder whether some of the names of characters could be changed to standardise a smaller cast, if that was possible I do not know at this stage.[62]

One minute later he seems to have realised that he ought to leave a signature and so he edited the page again in order to manually add "sentinel68 aest 12.03am Feb 8, 2007."

The opening edit exemplifies Sentinel68's interest in the project. In an interview with one of the wiki administrators, Joanna Howard, he writes that to create a collaborative fiction one needs:

1.  Clear communication of plot and genre (clear forum for conveying of it and arguing/dialoguing).

2.  One needs to agree to build upon and add to the work of others, not readily remove, (unless clear process and reason to do so, and communicated in foresaid forum). (Howard 2007)

These principles informed both the content he created and the structures he changed. Much of the story that he added, whether or not it survived, is intensely reflective of the struggles he saw in "A Million Penguins" such as this example from this first foray into adding to the story.

> He didn't want to remove any of it. It was all creative, it was all brilliant. yet, he knew his ill-disciplined juxtaposing was like baking a cake with too many ingredients. He had so many ideas that he didn't know which one to follow through to the end.[63]

It is also noteworthy that when he first started he seems to have been quite unsure of how to use Media Wiki software or the etiquette of wiki authoring. In his first content addition he tries to create a subheading, tentatively calling his addition "Chapter 12.b – The Orson Welles effect" and fails. He also manually added his signature to indicate that he had written the section despite the etiquette that all content in the main pages is meant to be collaborative and unsigned.[64]

His knowledge of and expertise with the wiki improved massively and he appears to have taken his self-appointed role of creating order very seriously. When he is accused of moving around chapters to destroy the flow of the story he writes back in his user talk page:

> I REPEAT, i have done some editing to and re-titling of chapters but basically have kept them in exactly the order that I have found them. Maybe others have moved things around, but I am just working with what i find here and as I said I have not deleted a whole section of someone else's work, and have tried to incorporate others works in some kind of flow.[65]

Over the period of the wiki novel, the vast majority of Sentinel68's edits were to main pages – 1,060 out of his 1,114 in total. Most of these consisted of editing and tidying and moulding the wikinovel into something he regarded as consistent. For example, he changes a chapter heading on the "Welcome" page from "The Fruit Ball and All" to "Eden Mark II - Is 'Banana' the New 'Apple'"[66] while in a section called "Brain food" he corrects the misspelling of "reveled."[67]

Sentinel68 was tireless and, given that he was in Australia, his edits often came at times when the wiki was relatively quiet. He did not, however, work behind the scenes. He added a lot of content of his own, particularly focusing on passages which directly or indirectly referenced the issues involved with mass collaboration. For example, he was particularly interested in the notion of the gestalt, creating a page of that name[68] three days after he first started and then developing the theme on the welcome page by changing the preface name from "communion" to "gestalt"[69] and then modifying the text "I'm hoping for the best" to "I am more than hoping for the best, the results will truly be an extraordinary 'organic' communion; bigger than the sum of its individual members."[70] This Gestalt section would draw the ire of YellowBanana.

It is perhaps best to return to the metaphor of gardening to describe Sentinel68's edits. The gardening metaphor is widespread in discussion about wiki behaviour[71] as a way of understanding how wikis expand or fail. Although a gardener may create 'content' their main activity consists of pruning, replanting, re-ordering and so on. A gardener is active and present in the wiki 'garden' not just through editing content but through their interactions with others. Although the majority of Sentinel68's edits were to the content of the wiki, he also spent a lot of time editing user pages: both his and others'. He used those edits to praise or complain. So for example, he creates a user page for Yodelero where he writes, "I love your afterword, it is brilliant, cheerio sentinel68."[72] Conversely, he created a page for the user BacktoFront where he wrote "I don't know what your obsession with undergarments is but it is neither funny, relevant or helpful."[73] Both of these interventions are designed to influence the behaviour on the wiki; Sentinel68's gardening was not just about modifying content but attempting to influence what content got added.

What is most noticeable about Sentinel68's edits is that he only ever made three contributions to the talk pages for the wiki and two of those were the first two edits he ever made. Instead he focused all his communication with other wiki writers through their user pages and associated talk pages. In this way he is acting in a deliberately non-performative manner in that his interventions are not in commonly edited centres of discussion but in the quiet byways of the wiki's user pages. His interventions were routinely personal rather than public.

## Other gardeners

Sentinel68 was not alone in his attempts to create order. As well as the editorial team, several contributors attempted to help but none had the staying power of Sentinel68. One such example was Gamblor856.[74] As with Sentinel68, Gamblor856 made his first intervention in Talk:Welcome.

> I suggest dividing the story in multiple arcs, wherein the competing stories all function as arcs of a single story, with the connections tying them together to be revealed in the conclusion, or in crossovers between the arcs. --User:Gamblor956:Gamblor956[75]

Gamblor856 then proceeded to try to implement this idea by cross-referencing and standardising all the chapter names and versions of the novel, creating linked character lists and generally bringing order to the wiki. This did not sit well with everybody and, like Sentinel68, Gamblor856 got attacked for their efforts. Leperflesh, a fairly well-known vandal, created a user page for Gamblor856 and wrote:

> It's great that you are creating pages for each chapter. It sucks that you are removing the humor of the chapter naming, as well as dropping chapters, as you go. Why would you do that? Just to crush creativity? --Leperflesh 20:00, 5 February 2007 (EST)[76]

### An gardener's job is never done

Sentinel68 never lost his passion for improving the wiki novel. On April 22nd, long after the experiment had ended he can be found writing on the project blog.

> Hi, I know the editing has now been closed, but if you editor guys at Penguin are still out there, can I suggest some minor corrections that have been bugging me. They don't change anything substantial to the structure of the novel, they are just correcting two glaring errors.
> namely….in the chapter on the main page called True story
> (Main_Page#True_Story)
> The statue of Mary Poppins is actually on the corner of Richmond and Kent Streets, Maryborough, Queensland. and not as printed here incorrectly as the corner of March and Kent. ( This is just a factual correction).
> http://amillionpenguins.com/blog/?p=30#comments

**The layout is borked**  [edit]

At the bottom the link is "chapter 5 onwards", already all of the chapter 5's, the link starts with chapter 6, each succesive page is borked in the same manner. --Sun Tzu 19:06, 8 February 2007 (EST)

Yesterday, I attempted to fix it. I did some page moving and renamed the different pages (except the first page) "Section A novel *x*", where *x* is some number. This makes alot more sense when the number of chapters and thier names are constantly in flux. --Lincoln 12:39, 9 February 2007 (EST)

This tension between order and creativity was prevalent throughout "A Million Penguins" and indicates that gardening was not always seen as a positive activity. Over-zealous gardening ran the risk of stifling the creativity in "A Million Penguins." According to WikiPatterns, "A WikiGardener is usually a well liked member of the community since s/he plays a role that is similar to a proofreader and editor in other environments,"[77] yet as can be seen throughout "A Million Penguins," gardening was often contentious and gardeners often viewed with some suspicion.[78]

## Garden gnomes

It is possible to find users who worked as WikiGnomes: correcting things quietly in the background. No frequent editor acted in this way but many made just a few edits. For example, one user called Monkeyelf[79] performed just two edits, both in the sci-fi section of the wiki novel, both of which were simple bits of correction such as those excerpts shown below where the user corrects the tense.[80]

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**WikiGnome**

A WikiGnome works behind the scenes to tie up little loose ends, adding ISBNs of books that people mention, tracking down the authorship of "someone once said" quotes, correcting BrokenLinks, fixing BrokenWhitespace, answering AnswerMes, tirelessly replacing ChatMode with content, fixing misspellings, and, when appropriate, making ordinary words into WordsSmashedTogetherLikeSo. (http://c2.com/cgi/wiki?WikiGnome)

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Unlike gardeners, WikiGnomes rarely make major changes to the structure of the wiki consequently their actions are often not noticed. Although there were no frequent editors who acted purely as WikiGnomes there were a large number of infrequent users who, when they edited a page, acted as WikiGnomes by correcting a small mistake or bringing an issue to the administrators' attention.

| Before | After |
|---|---|
| "I think we should blown them to hell," you replied | "I think we should blow them to hell," you replied. |
| "Gladly," you say, as you eagerly swung around in your chair, pressed the red "fire" button, and watched as the Vangorn personnel carrier broke up in space, killing all 150 men aboard. | "Gladly," you said, as you eagerly swung around in your chair, pressed the red "fire" button, and watched as the Vangorn personnel carrier broke up in space, killing all 150 men aboard. |

There were 570 users who edited the wiki on just one or two occasions and of these, it is possible to identify around 380 users whose edits were small, simple corrections. The wiki novel may not have been *written* by a large community but it was quietly *edited* by a large number of WikiGnomes who fixed just one or two things each.

Comparing the different types of  contributor behaviour helps show that activities such as "gardening" and "performing" and "gnoming" exist on something of a continuum. The key determiners tend to be the style of contribution and the location of it. The performers such as Pabruce and Nostrum19 jumped straight into the most popular areas and started to edit while also contributing to the main talk pages. Gardeners such as Sentinel68 focused on corrections and tended to contribute to the user talk rather than the main talk pages while gnomes tended only to make corrections and rarely, if ever, contributed to any sort of talk page. Between them, these types of

**user page** | discussion | edit | history

# User:BigTony

Cheerio to all the Penguin novelists - from The Wheelers Hill Writers Cooperative, Melbourne Australia; JohnH, jrh001, Construction/Destruction and BigTony (the contributor not the character).

activities were responsible for the wiki growing at a tremendous rate. Even the vandals contributed through their more problematic interventions.

# The Wiki – a party in the park?

The dominant metaphor for wikis in general has been that of the "garden". The notion was first suggested by Ward Cunningham and has become ubiquitous in the work of people like Stewart Mader, whose book, *WikiPatterns*, derived from the enormously influential Wikipatterns website, features a pot of tufted greenery on the cover and offers to help "plant and grow a successful wiki." (2008) The basic premise is that a wiki grows from the bottom up and structure emerges over time, something along the lines of cultivating wild lands. In this metaphor, users are gardeners who are responsible for seeding, organising, weeding and watering the material in the wiki. The key element of this understanding is the use of linking to connect the different pages of the wiki together so that the 'garden' flourishes. A brief look at wikis such as Wikipedia, WikiWikiWeb or Wikipatterns will show the way in which each page is linked to many other pages, allowing users to freely follow their chosen train of thought. Failure to create these links between pages leads to *wastelands* of unlinked pages or *walled gardens* of pages that only link to each other and are not integrated with the rest of the wiki.

The question then is, can "A Million Penguins" be understood in light of the garden metaphor or is something different required? In the first instance, the numbers have a story to tell.

An examination of the wiki shows that 366 of the nearly 500 content pages don't contain any links, implying that approximately 75% of all these pages do not link to any other pages in the site. In addition there are 150 content pages that are not linked to by any other page. Taken together, it becomes clear that the majority of the content pages in "A Million Penguins" are not linked to each other. Most of the pages in "A Million Penguins" should be consider akin to wastelands: undeveloped, unlinked fragments of content.

Where there are 'gardens' in the wiki, they appear to be walled. There are at least seven nascent novels in "A Million Penguins" most of which do not connect to each other. There is the "main" novel, various versions of it, including the "banana version" and several "choose your own adventure" style stories. Although the pages around the main novel tend to be the most viewed and most edited, the other novels often have clusters of frequently viewed pages. There are also little pockets of activities that fit the description of a walled garden. On such example is presented here: Sun Tzu's user page.

## Sock Puppets and the Art of War

This sentence "New job: fix Mr. Gluck's hazy TV, PDQ" is one which uses each letter of the alphabet just once. We suspect that the user Sun Tzu is a "sock puppet" (i.e. alternate login name) for the user Lincoln (http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php/User:Lincoln). Note Lincoln's comment on Leperflesh's user talk page "I added the Sun Tzu bit. --Lincoln 17:31, 7 February 2007 (EST)" (http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php/User_talk:Leperflesh)

## Walled Gardens – the case of Sun Tzu's user page

The user Sun Tzu – named after a Chinese general – created an extensive walled garden in the wiki novel centered on their user page. The text on their page includes a link to Wikipedia's description of Sun Tzu and the following sentence: "New job: fix Mr. Gluck's hazy TV, PDQ!"[81] Each letter in that sentence is a link to a page in the wiki novel which then links back to Sun Tzu's user page; hence the reason that the page "User:Sun Tzu" is the

fourth most linked-to page in the wiki. So, for example, if the first letter "N" is clicked then a page is loaded with the following text:

> Now the reason the enlightened prince and the wise general conquer the enemy whenever they move and their achievements surpass those of ordinary men is foreknowledge. -Sun Tzu[82]

The 29 linked pages (the user was unable to find a use for "X") form a web that does not link into any other part of the wiki though some users have created incoming links to Sun Tzu's user page. The set of pages forms a walled garden because it, largely, does not interact with the rest of the wiki. Within received wiki wisdom, walled gardens are seen as "dead" patches. On wikiwikiweb it is stated that:

> If you feel you have a lot of content to contribute to a wiki all at once, you may be tempted to write a bunch of different pages, interlinking them all. **Don't**. We call this is a WalledGarden, and it stands out in stark contrast to the areas of the ThisWiki that are living. The living areas are much trafficked, edited by many and read by even more. They exhibit the selflessness of a living space, belonging to nobody and everybody. If you learn to slowly integrate your own wisdom into this broader space, the process will be far messier and slower, but the feedback you receive from others will be more considered and rewarding.[83]

Although Sun Tzu's user page is an interesting case of the creative use of linking in a wiki, it is not collaborative to any extent and doesn't significantly contribute to the wiki. Some users did notice the page and added some material but on the whole, the pages in this walled garden were edited just once and then left untouched.[84]

## A Million Walled Gardens

The existence of so many unintegrated elements in "A Million Penguins" may well be why the wiki novel is often claimed to fail as *literature*. For example, in "Emily's LitCrit Blog" the author writes that "[i]t felt like 21 short stories with all the same character names, not one cohesive piece of literature."[85] Similarly, blogging at the Institute for the Future of the Book, Ben Vershbow muses "[h]ow ironic it would be if each user ended up just creating their own page and writing the novel they wanted to write -- alone."[86] Comments from observers have tended to focus on the wiki novel as a "failure" and 'proof' that collaborative authoring isn't possible.[87] It is arguable, however, that part of the appeal of "A Million Penguins" is the existence of these walled gardens. In Penguin's Blog, Jon Elek writes

> "Do not attempt to read this as a traditional novel. Swim around in it a little, see what you like, read until you get bored. I find I can read in about 10 minute stints, which I reckon is pretty good considering what it's like. But then again, I can't sit down and read a lot of well known experimental writing for much more than that anyway."[88]

Indeed, during the authoring some of the contributors started to prize the quiet, out of the way places that would not be consistently edited, vandalised or otherwise interfered with. For example, in Talk:Welcome one contributor writes:

> Partner sought: is there anyone out there who wants to tag team on the Fantasy section of Write Your Own Adventure. No-one is touching it - and it seems like a quiet place to get some solid writing done. Look forward to replies. (Tim, Australia)[89]

This use of walled gardens as somewhere that real work could get done was also echoed by the editorial team. Writing in the team blog, Kate Pullinger notes that

> …there's a really brilliant choose-your-own-adventure story aimed at women shaping up in the wiki now. I can't decide whether or not to post the url for it here, as I'd hate to see it defaced in any way - although real contributions are most encouraged. In a way, this is one of the most interesting aspects of the wiki novel at the moment - the secret corners where people are making really interesting collaborative works. But is also throws up a dilemma - do we publicise these finds and risk seeing them damaged, or not?[90]

It appears that the walled gardens served a function in "A Million Penguins" rather than being a dysfunctional part of the wiki. The metaphors by which people talked about them, referring to them as 'secret' or 'quiet' also imply a rather different understanding of the wiki. Instead of characterising "A Million Penguins" as a failed garden it makes more sense to think of it as something akin to a carnival with various stages for performance. One stage was the main stage where the "main" novel and all the surrounding activities occurred. Other stages were more out of the way, sometimes even hidden. One of the editorial team noticed this at an early stage but never developed her ideas when she wrote that the wiki novel reminded her of a party that had gone on too long.[91]

## A Million Numbers

As of March 7th, when the wiki closed, at least 75,000 different people had viewed the site.[92] Of those, 1,476 people had registered as users of the wiki. It is useful therefore to consider a differentiation between an *audience* who viewed the wiki but never registered and a *crowd* of roughly 1,500 who registered and had the potential to contribute. This crowd can be conceived of as *present* in the wiki even though not all members of the crowd actually contributed anything.

Indeed, most of those who registered for the wiki either never contributed or contributed on just one occasion. Although there were over 11,000 edits made, the majority of those edits were performed by a relatively small number of contributors. Pabruce made 1,780 edits while Sentinel68 performed 1,144 edits. These two performed 2,924 edits between them: over 25% of all edits.

Given that so many edits were done by so few, it is legitimate to ask whether "A Million Penguins" follows a pattern known as the "90-9-1 theory." (Nielsen 2006). Roughly put, the theory is that 90% of all users of any specific Internet resource are "lurkers" who read but never contribute, 9% are occasional contributors, and 1% are extremely frequent contributors. If this ratio applied to "A Million Penguins" we would expect to find that roughly 1320 members of the crowd had never contributed, 130 had contributed infrequently and up to 15 had been very frequent contributors. The figures are more complex than that though.

The user pages show that roughly 55% of registered users had never edited the wiki (814). Of those that had edited the wiki, however, most (570) had done this on just one occasion.[93] Not counting the seven members of the editorial team, the remainder of the registered users (85) had edited the wiki on multiple occasions. As a participation ratio this appears to be closer to 55-40-05. However, if we group those who had contributed just once with those who never contributed and look into more detail at those frequent contributors then something more akin to the 90-9-1 theory emerges. Of the 85 who contributed on multiple different occasions, most (67) had contributed on 5 occasions or fewer, 18 had contributed more often and two had contributed over 1,000 edits each. This is summarized in Figure 1 below.

The numbers imply that rather than thinking of an non-interactive crowd of "lurkers" forming 90% of the participants, we can conceive of the registered users as a *crowd* of people occasionally reacting to a number of *performers* some of whom are recognised as star performers. This suggests that it would be appropriate to depict of "A Million Penguins" as somewhat like a carnival where the audience reacts to various performances while the performers react to each other and the audience. It is possible that members of the audience may briefly become performers as they interact and performers themselves may join the audience in a fluid interchange of roles.

A similar pattern emerges when we look at page views and edits. As previously stated, the "Welcome" page was vastly more frequently viewed than any other page on the wiki. The page functioned much like the main stage of a festival or carnival; it was the central place for all activities. Ironically its very popularity seems to have driven many frequent contributors to find places 'away' from this central place where they could gather undisturbed. "Welcome" is full of laughter, some of it malicious, some of it purely joyful. It reads like a parody of a parody and its history file shows multiple, often antagonistic voices vying to be heard. The quieter, more orderly pages were edited far less frequently and show a steady accumulation and refining of the text: which is to say they act in the way that wiki pages are meant to.

## Participation levels by registered users

| Participation Level | Number | Percentage |
|---------------------|--------|------------|
| Never Edited | 814 | 55.4% |
| Edited once | 570 | 38.8% |
| Edited 2-5 times | 67 | 4.6% |
| Edited 6+ times | 18 | 1.2% |

**Participation Levels**



Edited 2-5 times 5%
Edited 6+ times 1%
Edited once 39%
Never Edited 55%
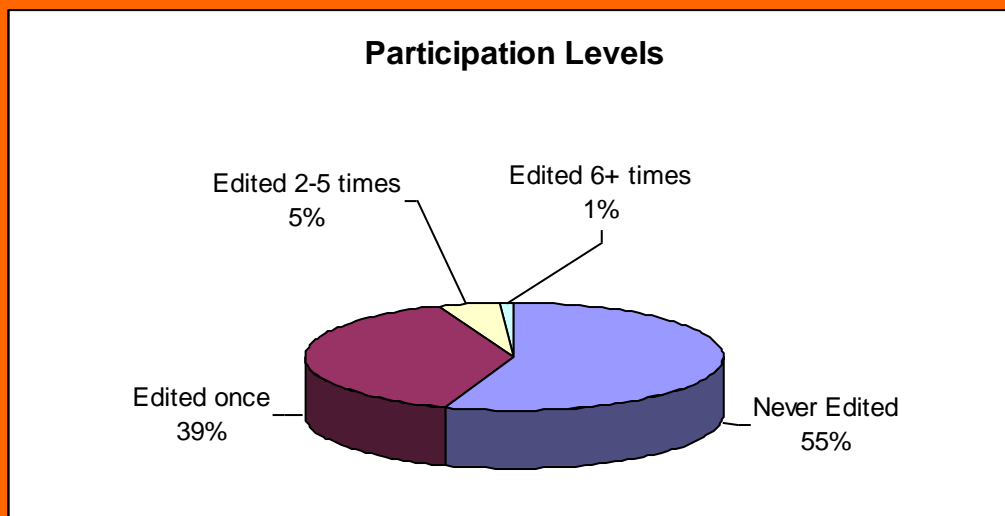
**Figure 1 Participation by registered users**

The structure of the wiki itself is the embodiment of the reversal of a successful wiki pattern. The vast number of unlinked pages and presence of multiple "walled gardens" as revealed through linking patterns would normally be thought of as dysfunctional. In a carnival setting, though, they make sense as small knots of activity, as performances in their own settings within the larger setting.

The numbers and structure of the wiki, both in its final form and as revealed through its history pages show a pattern of behaviour that may be best described as carnivalesque. In this respect "A Million Penguins" can be best understood not as an "inevitable" or "glorious" failure of the community to write a novel but as something wholly different, something akin to a carnival.

## A Carnival of Penguins

Examining the behaviour of the contributors and the structure of the resulting wiki leads to a characterisation of "A Million Penguins" as a specific type of performance: a carnival. Writing in *Rabelais and His World*, the influential philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin associated the notion of carnival with subversion and reversal. At a carnival the ordinary people could poke fun at authority and play at overturning the power relationships in their society. Because a carnival was a "time out of time" then all who partook were equal and all were members of a collective. At the same time, carnival was an event that was fundamentally playful because it was known to be bounded; the reversals that took place always ended. For the duration of a carnival, however, the fundamental action was laughter, a complex, "ambivalent" laughter which is "gay, triumphant and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives. Such is the laughter of carnival," (Bakhtin 1968: 11-12).

There are two reversals exemplified in "A Million Penguins." The first type is the reversal of the author-publishing relationship through the use of a wiki. By setting up a wiki which anyone could edit

under the official imprimatur of Penguin Books, the company set up a carnival relationship with the potential authors. The second reversal was that of wiki norms. Much of "A Million Penguins" is grounded in wiki norms but on the whole these norms have been reversed to produce a wiki that is most unlike a wiki. These reversals can be demonstrated both through looking at some of the statistics of the wiki's use as well as the traces of behaviour in the wiki novel.

There appear to be two main elements that resulted in the carnivalesque nature of "A Million Penguins." The first was the presence of Penguin Books as an authority within the context of a wiki. Penguin's first blog entry introducing "A Million Penguins" asked "…most importantly, can writers really leave their egos at the door?"[94] implying that the key issue might be the need for writers to assert authorship while participating. It seems likely, however, that the most important factor determining the participation of the writers was the presence of one of the world's most influential fiction publishing businesses. It was clear that some of the individuals hoped to be noticed by Penguin Books. The second key element was the bounded duration of the project. A carnival is only a carnival because it is has an endpoint. During the period of the carnival the normal rules are suspended or reversed.

When Penguin Books set up "A Million Penguins" they wondered if the normal 'rules' of authoring would be reversed. What actually seems to have been reversed are the normal rules of publishing and the relationship between the authors and the publisher. Every unvarnished, unfinished, ephemeral thought, edit and scribbling could be instantly published with Penguin Books' masthead attached to it. So it was.

The content of the wiki novel also indicates the carnivalesque nature of the contributions. Bakhtin focuses on the "grotesque" nature of carnival, the way in which the celebrants mark the overturning of the normal order through crude, bodily humour. Holquist states that for Bakhtin, the *folk* who participate in carnival are "blasphemous rather than adoring, cunning rather than intelligent; they are coarse, dirty and rampantly physical, reveling [sic] in oceans of strong drink, poods [sic] of sausage, and endless coupling of bodies." (1984: xix). Bakhtin celebrated the disorder of the folk, celebrated not only that they farted but enjoyed doing so. If one reads the wiki novel as celebration of excess and grotesque rather than a *crowdsourced* novel it makes sense in its own terms.

Not everyone, however, approves of carnival and most in the literary establishment appear to have disapproved to some extent or other of "A Million Penguins." Fay Weldon is said to have described it as "great fun" and "writing without responsibility."[95] Those outside of the literary establishment also consisted of many who disapproved of the revelry; this blog entry by Glen Farrelly is particularly revealing.

> With such a promising start I continued on, but it lost me after the first few sections
> in its meandering pointlessness and alcohol infatuation (even for me). The wisdom
> of crowds thus results in lots of descriptions of booze and drugs - surely the
> inevitable fart jokes will follow….
> Cool experiment. Just hope our species can resist the lure of fart jokes.[96]

James Pressley, writing on Bloomberg said of the wiki novel "[t]he first chapter is predictably horrible -- or was when I logged onto http://www.amillionpenguins.com early today. …

When I checked 30 minutes later, the opening had changed. It was getting worse, not better,".[97]

The commentators who responded favourably to it usually seem to have done so because of its carnivalesque nature, though not necessarily putting it in those terms. Brock Read, writing in *The Chronicle* noted that "Nabokov it ain't, but the Wiki novel should be fun to keep track of, thanks to fast-paced editing like that,"[98] while a writer on *Ars Technica* stated "[i]t's all in good fun, of course, and is likely to irritate only those who take it seriously."[99]

It was the very vitality of "A Million Penguins" that both appalled and intrigued commentators and contributors alike. The editorial team were initially at the point of despair after the first few days yet, once the pace of editing started to slow, there is almost a note of wistfulness that creeps into their discussion. One email topic on the editors' private discussion list is "time for reflection - is everything slowing down? is that a Good Thing?" One editor responded "[i]ndeed it is slowing down and I'm

partly relieved and partly wish it were busier."[100] It is possible to consider the pace of editing as an expression of excess. Carnival is all about noise and spectacle in excess as a reversal of the normal order that favours peace and quiet. In "A Million Penguins" this translates into the spectacle of the "Welcome" page changing almost minute by minute, of character names shifting and changing and mutating. It is this noisy, spectacular reversal of all the established norms of writing that both gave "A Million Penguins" its astonishing excitement and attracted so many complaints about its artistic value.

Considering "A Million Penguins" as a form of carnival opens up ways of understanding the wiki novel that goes beyond the somewhat simplistic characterisation of it as "shit."[101] The originators of the project created, inadvertently, a possibility for carnival and any carnival reflects on the world in which it was situated by reversing the norms and symbols of its surroundings. Writing about such reversals, Barabara Babcock states that, "Symbolic inversion may be broadly defined as any act of expressive behavior which inverts, contradicts, abrogates, or in some fashion presents an alternative to commonly held cultural codes, values and norms be they linguistic, literary or artistic, religious, or social and political." (1973: 14)

This interpretation of "A Million Penguins" also explains why the initial question of whether or not a community could write a novel turned out to be the wrong question: something acknowledged by Jon Elek, the literary editor for the project.[102] There was no community built around "A Million Penguins" because it was not a setting in which community could form. A 'crowd' certainly gathered around it and some users seem to have created small, ad-hoc groups of interest in bits of the wiki novel but there was no over-arching sense of communal construction.

This approach also helps explain the role that notions such as "co-creation" and "crowdsourcing" played in the wiki novel. Writing in *The Wisdom of the Crowds*, James Surowiecki claims that "groups are remarkably intelligent, and are often smarter than the smartest people in them." (2004: xiii). His analysis of the way that a "crowd" can aggregate information in order to arrive at solutions has underpinned research into co-creation a method by which creative collaboration can occur.[103] Similarly, theorists of online culture such as Charles Leadbetter and Clay Shirky argue that mass-participation in cultural and business activities opens up new modes of production and empowers people in new types of ways. "A Million Penguins" is a carnivalesque, which is to say somewhat rude, response to these notions. As with any carnival, however, it also re-affirms the reality in which it exists. The amount of work that went into "A Million Penguins" over a short period of time is staggering and indicates the potential for this type of collaboration.

New media critic, Ben Vershbow claimed that a wiki was the wrong tool for collaborative fiction authoring:

> The problem with A Million Penguins in a nutshell is that the concept of a "wiki-novel" is an oxymoron. A novel is probably as un-collaborative a literary form as you can get, while a wiki is inherently collaborative. Wikipedia works because encyclopedias were always in a sense collective works -- distillations of collective knowledge -- so the wiki was the right tool for reinventing that form. Here that tool is misapplied.[104]

To a certain extent this report's analysis of "A Million Penguins" corroborates his view because one thing that the wiki novel most definitely isn't is a novel. It also showed very little sign of collaborative work; the content may have been generated by many people yet, with occasional exceptions, the users rarely actively collaborated. Although final product is not one coherent novel, it does contain multiple versions and variants of plot lines and characters including parodic "banana-ised" versions. In addition there are nine "choose your own adventure" stories and uncountable fragments of plots, characters and ideas. The interplay between these pages seems more akin to oral folklore with multiple versions of the same story existing at the same time.

The folkloric multiple versions, some deliberately playful, some abandoned, some existing within a walled garden of connected pages can be seen as the "Long Tail" of the wiki. It is frequently asserted that the real value of user-generated content online comes from the millions of pages that are relatively unvisited (Anderson 2006). Commentators and contributors often found that the most interesting parts of the wiki novel were those that were hidden away from the central stage. Multiple unlinked pages are usually considered to be a problem for wikis but in "A Million Penguins" the reverse appears to be the case, providing yet one more example of how "A Million Penguins" turns wiki lore on its head.

## So – did a community write a novel?

Brock Read, blogging in the Chronicle of Higher Education, noted that the text was changing even as he was writing a post about "A Million Penguins", causing him to add a footnote:

> Update: Within minutes, one of the aforementioned passages — "the guys entered a small coffee shop in Boulder, Colorado" — had already been edited. For the time being, it's "two young muscular anonymous american proletarian factory workers, looking like they had walked straight off a Socialist realist propaganda poster," stopping in for a coffee.[105]

"A Million Penguins" contains examples of both the strengths and the weaknesses of large-scale online projects. Because it is highly likely to be seen as something that is out of the norm such a venture may be treated more as an opportunity for play and riotous behaviour than as serious collaborative work. Indeed, anyone who has engaged with online communities in the last two decades will recognise the tensions involved in keeping interest levels high enough to encourage participation without the community becoming so active that there is no hope of maintaining control. A relaxed approach which allows space and time for such activities may strengthen and facilitate successful co-creation communities.

This report has, necessarily, only focused on a small number of the topics that emerged from the research and it is hoped that it can point towards future studies of wiki behaviour. In particular, it is possible that applying a "transliteracy" perspective may help illuminate some of the issues surrounding competence in "A Million Penguins." Sue Thomas defines "transliteracy" as "the ability to read, write and interact across a range of platforms, tools and media from signing and orality through handwriting, print, TV, radio and film, to digital social networks." (2007) It is notable that many of the contributors to "A Million Penguins" struggled with several unfamiliar literacies: how to write a novel in a wiki form, how to actually use the wiki, what to edit and how to edit the text of others, not to mention the difficulties of knowing how to actually behave in the wiki's peculiar social environment. Sentinel68 struggled to understand how to use MediaWiki's automatic signature and when he should use his own. The editing patterns of some of the users show them frequently making one small change then, a few minutes later, adding another: as if they were testing to see it how it worked.  It wasn't just the contributors who struggled to deal with this. The very act of imagining the project in the first place was an experiment in what might happen when you try to transpose the act of writing a novel into a wiki, and vague hopes that it might produce something traditionally publishable were abandoned within hours of the wiki hitting the wires. Throughout the whole experiment the Penguin/DMU team were engaged in a constant quest to figure out what it was that they had just done, and this report itself represents only a few first steps in understanding what may have happened to literature, if anything, during the month of February 2007.

Certainly, some of the participants in the project did attempt to 'write a novel' but it remains unclear as to whether they succeeded. What today appears not to be a novel as we know it  may in time come

to be seen as one, just as work once judged not to be poetry is often later brought into the critical fold. But for the moment at least the answer to whether or not a community can write a novel appears to be 'not like this'. Our research has shown that "A Million Penguins" is something other than a novel and, thereby, opened up new questions and avenues for exploration. It has treated the final product not as a variation of a printed novel or something which could be turned into one, but as type of performance. The contributors did not form a community, rather they spontaneously organised themselves into a diverse, riotous assembly. We have demonstrated that the wiki novel experiment was the wrong way to try to answer the question of whether a community could write a novel, but as an adventure in exploring new forms of publishing, authoring and collaboration it was, ground-breaking and exciting.

The final product itself, now frozen in time, is more akin to something produced by the wild, untrammelled creativity of the folk imagination. The contributors to "A Million Penguins," like the ordinary folk of Bakhtin's carnivals, have produced something excessive. It is rude, chaotic, grotesque, sporadically brilliant, anti-authoritarian and, in places, devastatingly funny. As a cultural text it is unique, and it demonstrates the tremendous potential of this form to provide a stimulating social setting for writing, editing and publishing. The contributors may not have written one single novel but they did create something quite remarkable, an outstanding body of work that can be found both in the main sections as well as through the dramas and conversations lacing the "backstage" pages. And they had a damned good time while doing so. As the user Crtrue writes.[106]

> Hi hi hi hi hi!
>
> Seriously. This is going to fail horribly. It's still fun.

## Acknowledgements

## Authors & Information

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http://www.ioct.dmu.ac.uk/projects/amillionpenguinsreport.pdf

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For further information about other research funded by the Institute of Creative Technologies, see the website at http://www.ioct.dmu.ac.uk/research.html or contact the director, Andrew Hugill ahu@dmu.ac.uk

# Appendix I – Example Page History

This appendix demonstrates the edit history of one particular page: the user page of a contributor called "Hight."[107] The user page can be found on the wiki at: http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php/User:Hight



**Figure 2 Hight's user page**

As Figure 2 shows, the page consists of two distinct pieces of text, one of which appears to be written by a user called YellowBanana, and one from a user called Sentinel68. YellowBanana's edit is dated March 4th and Sentinel68's edit is dated March 6th. The puzzling thing about this page, thought, is that YellowBanana seems to be insulting himself. To solve the puzzle we can look at the history page[108] which is accessible by clicking the "history tab." The history page can be found at:

http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=User:Hight&action=history. As Figure 3, below shows, there were 3 edits in total with the first one performed by YellowBanana on March 5th when it was created as a new page.
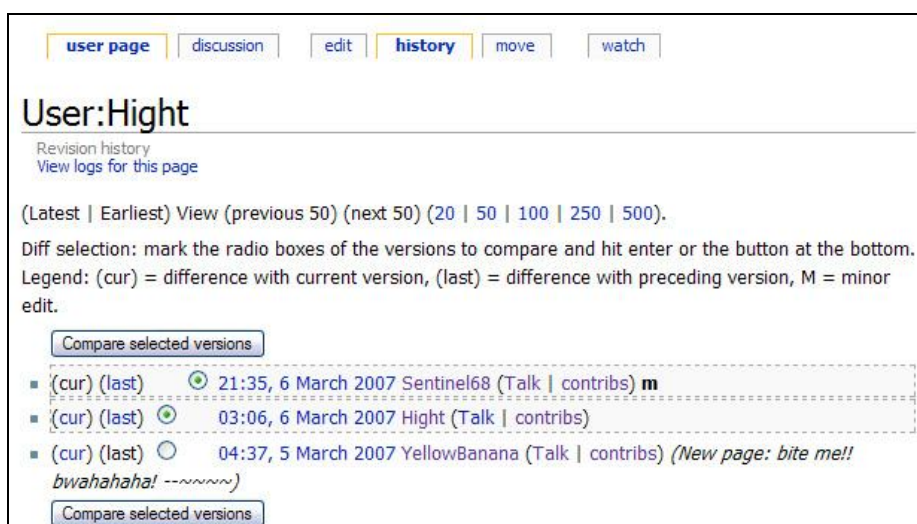


**Figure 3 History file for Hight's user page**

It is possible to open each saved page in the history to see how it looked. Clicking the link for YellowBanan's edit on March 5th reveals that the first version of the page read "bite me!! Bwahahaha!" and was signed by YellowBanana.[109] This is shown in Figure 4.



**Revision as of 04:37, 5 March 2007**

bite me!! bwahahaha!

--YellowBanana 23:37, 4 March 2007 (EST)

**Figure 4 First version of Hight's user page**

This first version was, then, nothing but an insult from YellowBanana aimed at Hight. The next day, Hight noticed what had been done to his page and edited it in order to turn the comment against YellowBanana.[110] This is shown in Figure 5.



**Revision as of 03:06, 6 March 2007**

I am an imbecile with a fetish for potty humor and fruit!

--YellowBanana 23:37, 4 March 2007 (EST)

**Figure 5 Second version of Hight's user page**

As can be seen, Hight has preserved YellowBanana's signature but changed the text to imply that YellowBanana is "an imbecile…." MediaWiki provides the ability to compare the two edits to show the changes. By comparing the first and second edits it is possible to analyse the edit using the screen shot shown in Figure 6 below. This image shows that the text "bite me!! Bwahahaha" (but not the exclamation mark) has been deleted and the text "I am an imbecile with a fetish for potty humor and fruit" has been added in. The final edit was performed later the same day by Sentinel68. In that edit, the user adds some supportive text to the page thanking Hight for his encouragement as well as commenting on YellowBanana.[111] When the wiki was closed, Sentinel68's edit was the most recent one so appears as the current version of the page.

**Figure 6 Difference between first and second versions**

This example shows the *history* leading up to the current page in the wiki and shows some of the options open to contributors. Every page in a wiki is the product of its history. In an open wiki, as every page can be edited at any time, it makes no sense to think of any one version of the page as *authoritative*, rather every current page is simply the current version.

# Appendix 2 – Statistical Information

This appendix provides detailed analysis of numerical information about the wiki as well as technical information about the wiki and the project. Issues to do with the numbers of pages, page views, page edits and users will be examined. The information provided here can be used in its own right or as a way of expanding the findings in the main body of the report. Some of the data in this appendix is repeated and/or expanded from that presented earlier and gathered together for ease of reference. The statistics were generated through the use of the MediaWiki interface and through exporting data into various spreadsheets in order to count and tabulate it.

## Page types in MediaWiki

MediaWiki categorises pages into various types.

Main Page: This is a page which is intended to hold content about a single subject.

Talk Page: This is a page which is intended for discussion about one specific main page. Each talk page uses the form talk:MainPageName to identify itself. So, for example, the talk page for a Main Page called "Foo" would be "Talk:Foo." Talk pages are created automatically by the software.

User Page. Whenever a user registers for a specific MediaWiki it creates a page based on the user name and gives it the prefix "user:" If a user registers with the name "Bruce" then their user page would be "User:Bruce."

User Talk Page. Whenever a User Page is created, MediaWiki automatically creates a talk page for it with the prefix "User talk:". Thus the user "Bruce" automatically acquires the page "User Talk:Bruce" when they register.

There are various other types of page that MediaWiki creates which are not relevant here. Note, however, that the only type of page that regular users can create are Main Pages, the rest are created by MediaWiki.

## Page Statistics

The wiki novel contains 1031 pages in total. Of those, 491 are main pages containing some form of user-generated content such as chapters, variations of chapters, character biographies and other miscellany.[112] In addition, the wiki contains 50 talk pages, 73 user pages and 47 user talk pages with content added to them. This represents a total of 661 pages with some kind of significant content. The rest of the pages are used by the software to contain information about the wiki and redirects.[113] This information is summarised in Figure 7.
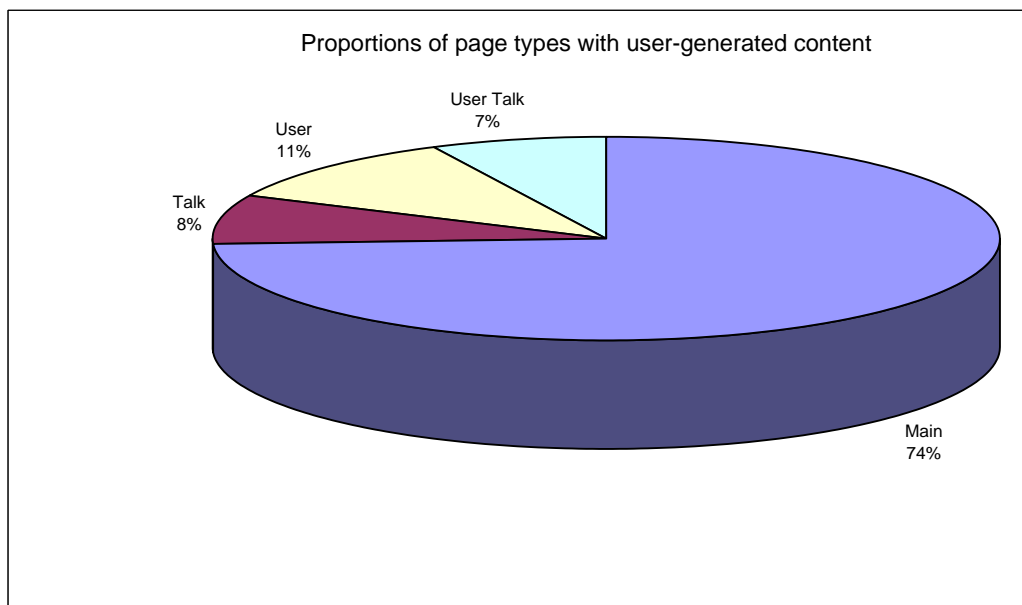
**Figure 7 Proportions of pages with user-generated content**

# Viewing Figures

As of 3rd April 2008 there had been 832,239[114] page views of the wiki novel and the top 10 most viewed pages were (number of views in brackets):

1. Welcome (282,327)
2. About (23,705)
3. Talk:Welcome (13,086)
4. Section 2 (10,110)
5. Pre-launch discussion (7,972)
6. Ethical guidelines (7,465)
7. Banana (7,194)
8. Current events (6,239)
9. Technical guidelines (5,869)
10. Joseph Carlos Sandiego (5,270)

As can be seen the most frequently viewed page, "Welcome," has been viewed nearly twelve times as often as the next frequently viewed page – "About." It has been viewed nearly 28 times as often as the most frequently viewed content page – "Section 2." This is to be expected as the "Welcome" page is the first page of the wiki that a visitor encounters and was, during the writing of the novel, usually the place where the main body, or at least the start, of the story was to be found. Five of the other nine in the top ten are "help" or information pages of some sort or other and one is the "talk" page for the welcome page. This leaves just three others which are content pages: "Section 2", "Banana" and "Joseph Carlos Sandiego." "Section 2" is the second page of the main novel and "Joseph Carlos Sandiego" is a biography page for "Carlo" – nominally the main character in the novel. "Banana" is a page of links to online videos featuring bananas in some way or other and is part of the attempt to "banana-ise" the novel. This is summarised in Figure 8.
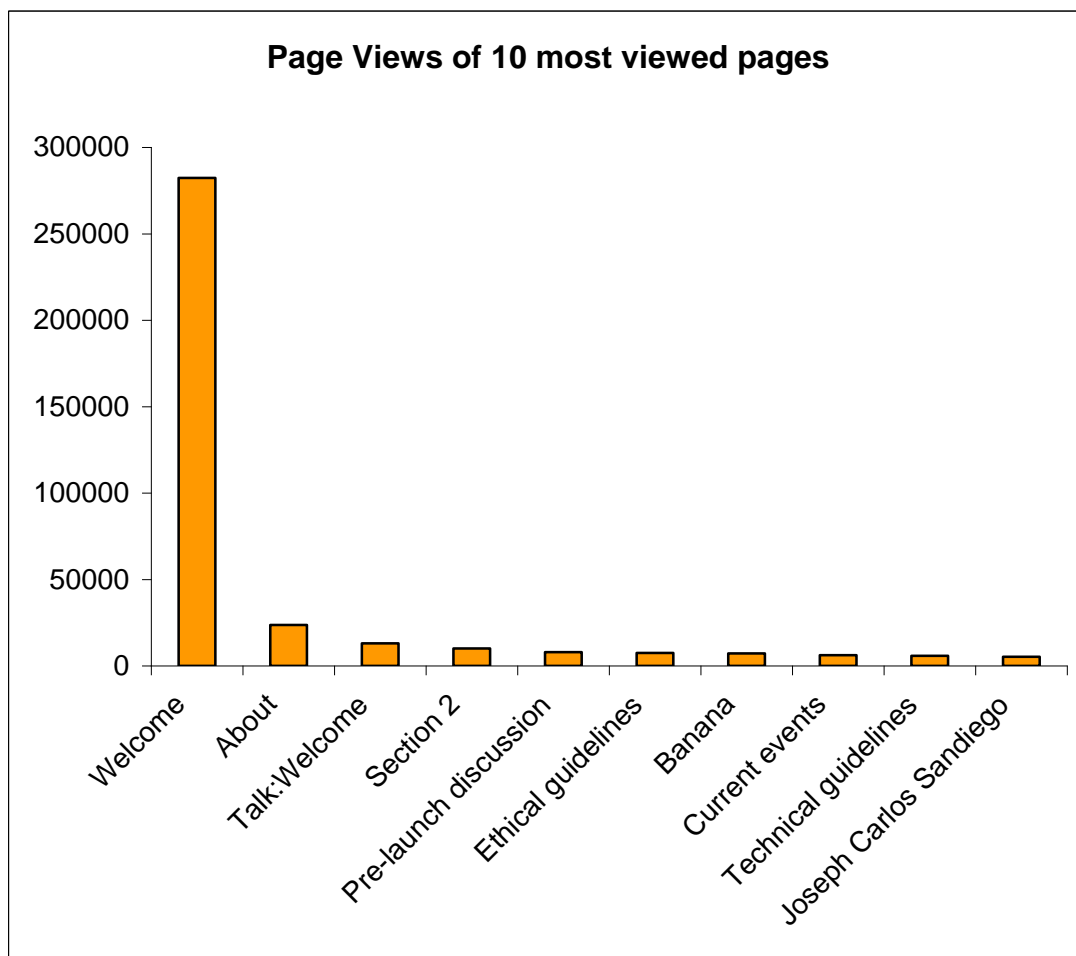
**Figure 8 Page views for 10 most viewed pages**

Approximately 34% of all visits to the wiki were to the front page. The next most popular content page, "Section 2," garnered just 1.2% of all visits. What is most noteworthy about these figures is the extreme domination of the front page, "Welcome," in the viewing statistics. This can be compared to Wikipedia.[115]

1.  Special:Search (453219819)
2.  Main Page (136036288)
3.  Special:Random (75392423)
4.  Wiki (4264295)
5.  Special:Watchlist (3756879)
6.  Barack Obama (2253851)
7.  Valentine's Day (2082274)
8.  Wikipedia (1980274)
9.  Canine reproduction (1785111)
10. John McCain (1250044)

If the three 'special' pages are discounted, then Wikipedia's Main Page is about 32 times more popular than the next most popular content page, "Barack Obama." The domination of the main page in Wikipedia is roughly equivalent to that of "A Million Penguins." However, users are more likely to enter Wikipedia through a search tool (hence the position of "Special:Search") than directly via the Main Page. In Wikipedia, the Main Page is a portal which primarily provides links to other articles while in "A Million Penguins" the Welcome Page is actually the start of the story.

# Page Edits

There were a 11,070 page edits to "A Million Penguins." As with page views it is useful to look at the most frequently edited pages (number of edits in brackets).

1. Welcome (4,686)
2. Continuance (438)
3. Section 2 (397)
4. Novel A Section 5 (332)
5. Novel A Section 2 (311)
6. Novel A Section 4 (148)
7. Novel A Section 3 (107)
8. Novel A Section 6 (106)
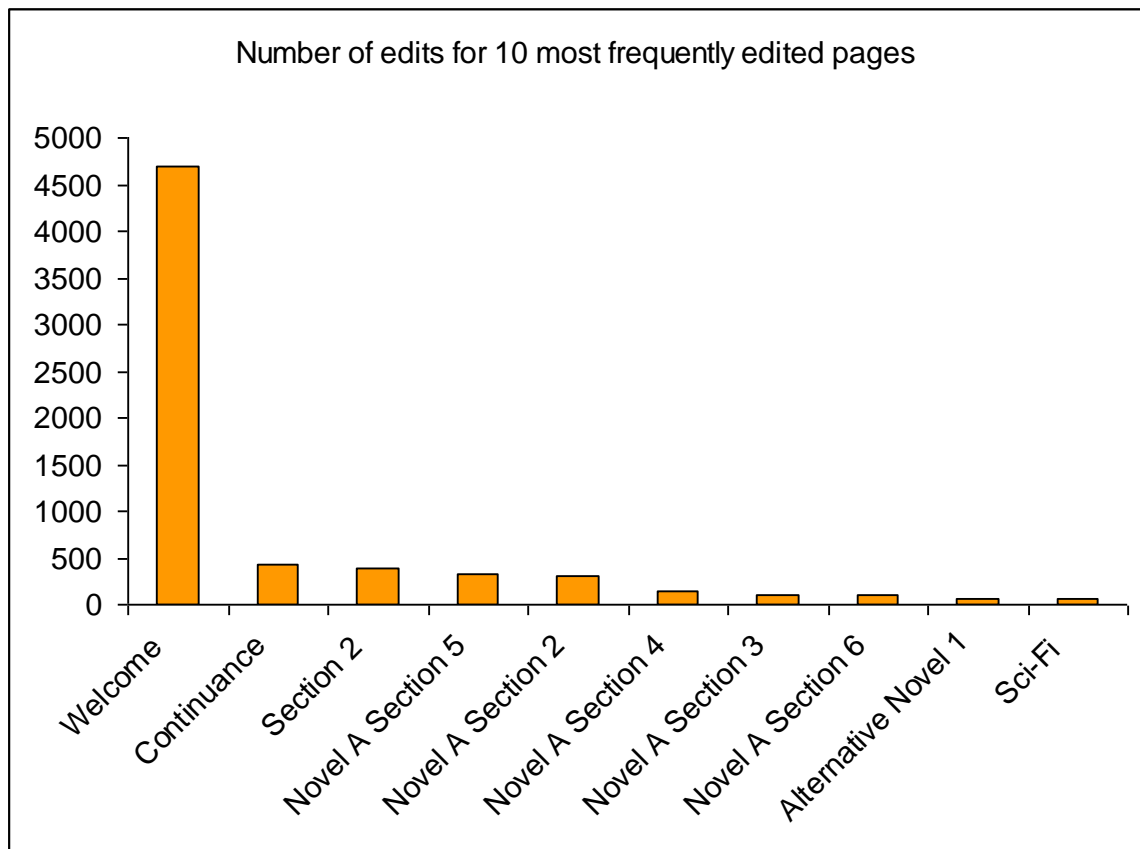9. Alternative Novel 1 (65)
10. Sci-Fi (55)



**Figure 9 Number of edits for 10 most frequently edited pages**

Clearly, the main page has been edited significantly more frequently than any other page; indeed it forms approximately 42% of all edits and has been edited ten times more frequently than the next most frequently edited page – "Continuance." The number of edits is not, however, a predictor of the number of views. The table below lists the 10 most frequently edited content pages and shows how frequently they were viewed as well as their position in a list of most viewed content pages. So, for example, the page Continuance is the 2nd most edited page but only the 10th most viewed one.

**Table 1 Views and Edits Compared**

| Page | Edits | | Views | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | **Rank** | **Number** | **Rank** | **Number** |
| Welcome | 1 | 4686 | 1 | 282338 |
| Continuance | 2 | 438 | 10 | 4885 |

| Section 2 | 3 | 397 | 3 | 10111 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Novel A Section 5 | 4 | 332 | 18 | 3335 |
| Novel A Section 2 | 5 | 311 | 13 | 4367 |
| Novel A Section 4 | 6 | 148 | 43 | 1983 |
| Novel A Section 3 | 7 | 107 | 41 | 2186 |
| Novel A Section 6 | 8 | 106 | 49 | 1724 |
| Alternative Novel 1 | 9 | 65 | 19 | 3341 |
| Sci-Fi | 10 | 55 | 36 | 2439 |

The pages titled "Novel A…" are the ones that form the "main" novel in the wiki so it is perhaps no surprise to see them being the most frequently edited in the wiki. Some pages seem more puzzling though. For example, the page "Continuance" consists of just four lines of text:



**Figure 10 Screen Capture for Continuance**

Delving into the history file reveals, however, that until the last moments of the wiki novel, this page was, effectively, "part 2" of the main novel. One of the main contributors, formalized the various sections, copied the text in continuance to Novel A section 2 and then replaced the text with the four lines of text.

# Links

This section looks at some of linking behaviour found in "A Million Penguins." A page is "linked-to" in a wiki if at least one other page contains a link to it. As can be seen from the list below, the most frequently linked-to page, "Carlo," is one which does not appear to be particularly frequently edited or viewed. This page, however, is a redirect to the page Joseph Carlos Sandiego, the biography of the character "Carlo." The "Welcome" page is only the third most linked-to page and there are two user pages that are routinely linked to.

## Linked to pages

1. Carlo (54 links)
2. Real Novel (41 links)
3. Welcome (34 links)
4. User:Sun Tzu (29 links)

5.   Inu (27 links)
6.   Penguin (27 links)
7.   Mikhael (26 links)
8.   User:Rrwm (22 links)
9.   Big Tony (21 links)
10.   Command (20 links)

## Link density

This is a measure of how many links exist per page. Presently there is no thorough research on how densely linked wikis are or are meant to be. The norm in Wikipedia and other major wikis is to link to as many other pages as possible. For example, Wikipedia has a warning flag for pages which have relatively few links but no such flag for having too many. Although there is no way to count links in a MediaWiki it is instructive to examine link density in Wikipedia compared to "A Million Penguins". For example, within the text of "Welcome" (roughly 10,000 words), there are 41 links to other pages in the wiki. A selection of random Wikipedia articles such as "Backroynm"[116] revealed much denser linking. Backronym contained 89 links in the main text of the article which was approximately 2,400 words long. Further research would be needed to draw any firm conclusions but it does appear that "A Million Penguins" may be much less densely linked than is considered the norm.

One way to further investigate this is to count the number of pages that either have no outgoing links or no incoming links or both. MediaWiki refers to these as "dead end" pages and "orphan" pages respectively. "A Million Penguins" contains 366 content pages which don't contain any links ("dead end" pages), and 150 pages that do not have any other pages in the wiki linking to them ("orphans"). Taken together, it becomes clear that the majority of the content pages in "A Million Penguins" are poorly linked into the wiki.

## Users

As of March 7th, when the wiki closed, the server statistics show that at least 75,000 different people had viewed the site.[117] Of those, 1,476 people had registered as users of the wiki and 7 of them were classified as administrators ("sysops").[118] These 1,476 will have included some instances of alternate logins for the same person, colloquially known as "sock puppets." In the first instance then we can differentiate between an audience that viewed but never registered (approximately 73,500 people), those who registered (1,469), and those who were authority figures (7). It is useful therefore to consider a differentiation between an *audience* who viewed the wiki but never registered and therefore never contributed and a *crowd* who registered and had the potential to contribute. Part of the crowd were the 7 members of Penguin Books and De Montfort University were the *authority* who had the ability to delete text permanently and block people from contributing.

Most of those who registered for the wiki either never contributed or contributed on just one occasion. Although there were over 11,000 edits made, the majority of those edits were performed by a relatively small number of contributors. The contributor pabruce made 1,780 edits while Sentinel68 performed 1,144 edits. These two performed 2,924 edits between them: over 25% of all edits.

## Participation levels by registered users

| Participation Level | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Never Edited | 814 | 55.4% |
| Edited once | 570 | 38.8% |
| Edited 2-5 times | 67 | 4.6% |
| Edited 6+ times | 18 | 1.2% |

### Participation Levels

Edited 2-5 times 5%

Edited 6+ times 1%
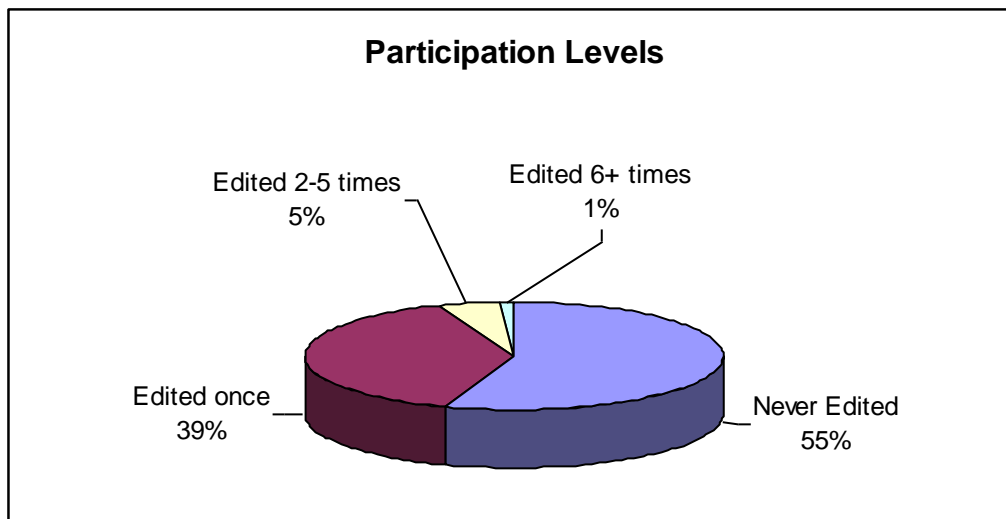
Edited once 39%

Never Edited 55%

**Figure 11 Participation by registered users**

If the 90-9-1 ratio (Nielsen 2006) applied to "A Million Penguins" we would expect to find that roughly 1320 registered members had never contributed, 130 had contributed infrequently and up to 15 had been very frequent contributors. Investigating the user pages shows that roughly 55% of registered users had never edited the wiki (814). Of those that had edited the wiki, however, most (570) had edited the wiki on just one occasion.[119] Not counting the seven sysops, the remainder of the registered users (85) had edited the wiki on multiple occasions. As a participation ratio this appears to be closer to 55-40-05. However, if we group those who had contributed just once with those who never contributed and look into more detail of those "frequent" contributors then something more akin to the 90-9-1 theory emerges. Of the 85 who contributed on multiple different occasions, most (67) had contributed on 5 occasions or fewer and 18 had contributed more often. This is summarised in Figure 11 above – repeated from Figure 1.

To indicate how much of the wiki had been created by whom we can look at how many edits each of these different categories of users made. If we divide the population of users into 4 types: those who never edited, those who edited on one occasion, those who edited on 2-5 occasions and those who edited on 6 or more occasions we can visually depict how much of the wiki they were responsible for. This is summarised in Figure 12.

Taken together, these figures help demonstrate the types of behaviour that occurred in the wiki novel through quantifying them. When read in conjunction with a qualitative analysis, as presented in the main body of this report, it is possible to characterise this behaviour more fully.
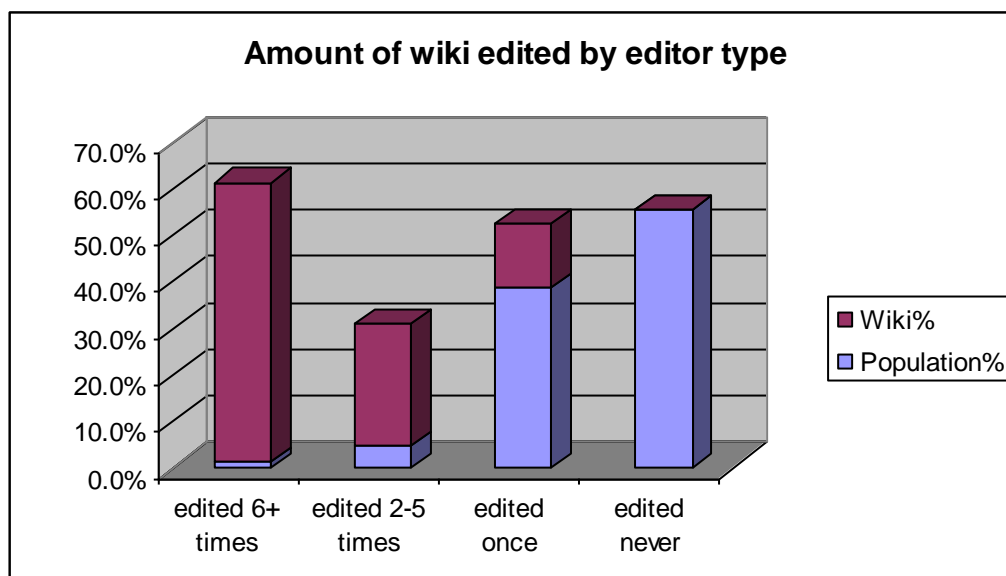
**Amount of wiki edited by editor type**

**Figure 12 Amount of wiki edited by editor type**

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# Endnotes

All url's referenced in the endnotes were last retrieved on 24 April 2008.

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[1] Used on the A Million Penguins blog header - http://www.amillionpenguins.com/blog/.

[2] Quoted in the A Million Penguins Blog at http://amillionpenguins.com/blog/?p=28.

[3] http://www.quillandquire.com/blog/index.php/2007/02/01/the-advent-of-wikilit/

[4] http://celestialprunes.blogspot.com/2007/02/million-penguins.html

[5] http://www.yaleherald.com/article.php?Article=5445

[6] http://www.linux.com/feature/60438

[7] http://www.hyperorg.com/blogger/mtarchive/a_million_penguins_at_a_keyboa.html

[8] http://thepenguinblog.typepad.com/the_penguin_blog/2007/03/a_million_pengu.html

[9] Personal interview 24th January 2008.

[10] http://c2.com/cgi/wiki?WikiHistory

[11] WikiWikiWeb can found at http://c2.com/cgi/wiki.

[12] http://www.wiki.org/wiki.cgi?WhatIsWiki

[13] For a description of the principles he posits see http://c2.com/cgi/wiki?WikiDesignPrinciples

[14] The public record of the pre-launch discussion can be found at the A Million Penguins blog for January 2007 at
http://amillionpenguins.com/blog/?m=200701 and on the wiki novel at
http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php/Pre-launch_discussion.

[15] The quote is taken from the first line of Charlotte Brontë's, *Jane Eyre.*

[16] http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2005/jun/22/media.pressandpublishing

[17] http://amillionpenguinsanddmu.blogspot.com/2007/02/million-penguins-and-dmu.html

[18] http://amillionpenguinsanddmu.blogspot.com/2007/02/with-that-hope-that-springs-eternal.html

[19] http://amillionpenguinsanddmu.blogspot.com/2007/02/ive-had-similar-experience-of-rage-and.html

[20] http://www.futureofthebook.org/blog/archives/2007/02/a_million_penguins_a_wikinovel.html#c81181

[21] http://amillionpenguins.com/blog/?p=28

[22] The website wikipatterns.com and its associated book (madder 2008) along with WikiWikiWeb are the two main
sources of information about wiki use patterns drawn on here.

[23] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=User:Pabruce&oldid=10793

[24] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=User_talk:Sentinel68&oldid=10632

[25] See http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php/Strange_evolution_of_the_strychnine_thread

[26] The text is formatted to indicate that this is a quote directly from the wiki novel. All such quotes are presented
exactly as typed.

[27] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=User:Pabruce&oldid=7428

[28] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=Continuance&oldid=7427

[29] At one point he had deleted a list of authors that had been added to the wiki by Sunlight, one of the editorial team.

[30] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php/Lewis_Oswald

[31] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php/User:Nostrum19

[32] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=User_talk:K1&oldid=2035

[33] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=User:Djjansen&diff=prev&oldid=2158

[34] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=User:Nostrum19&oldid=3061

[35] A "Choose your own…" novel is one where at the end of each section the reader must choose which section to read next based on a series of options.

[36] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=Talk:Welcome&oldid=1131

[37] http://amillionpenguinsanddmu.blogspot.com/2007/02/good-stuff.html

[38] http://amillionpenguinsanddmu.blogspot.com/2007/02/sunday-evening.html

[39] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=User:Nostrum19&oldid=6453

[40] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php/User:YellowBanana

[41] YellowBanana is referred to as male though we have no actual evidence as to his gender.

[42] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=Welcome&diff=prev&oldid=7476

[43] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=Here&oldid=7482

[44] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=Welcome&oldid=7485

[45] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php/Id/ego/smeg

[46] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=Novel_A_Section_4&oldid=7681

[47] http://amillionpenguins.com/blog/?p=23

[48] http://amillionpenguins.com/blog/?p=23#comment-226

[49] http://amillionpenguins.com/blog/?p=23#comment-249

[50] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=Novel_A_Section_4&oldid=10272

[51] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=User_talk:YellowBanana&action=history

[52] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php/Banana_version_of_novel

[53] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=User:YellowBanana&oldid=10318

[54] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php/Special:Contributions/Assassinyin

[55] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=Welcome&diff=prev&oldid=3155

[56] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=Welcome&diff=prev&oldid=7707

[57] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=Continuance&diff=prev&oldid=7709

[58] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php/Special:Contributions/Brutalhelm

[59] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php/Special:Contributions/Carlgriffiths

[60] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=Talk:Welcome&oldid=8163

[61] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php/User:Sentinel68

[62] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=Talk:Section_2&oldid=5058

[63] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=Section_2&oldid=5060

[64] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=Section_2&oldid=5060

[65] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=User_talk:Sentinel68&oldid=6594

[66] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=Welcome&oldid=8923

[67] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=Welcome&oldid=8824

[68] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=Gestalt&oldid=6407

[69] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=Welcome&oldid=6420

[70] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=Welcome&oldid=6423

[71] See for example http://c2.com/cgi/wiki?GardeningMetaphor

[72] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=User:Yodelero&oldid=6841

[73] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=User:BackToFront&oldid=10567

[74] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php/User:Gamblor856

[75] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=Talk:Welcome&oldid=3646 Note that rather confusingly, Gamblor856 has signed their name as Gamblor956 here. There is no record of a Gamblor956 in the database.

[76] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=User:Gamblor856&oldid=3872

[77] http://www.wikipatterns.com/display/wikipatterns/WikiGardener+and+WikiGnome

[78] Mader does make the point that some users of a wiki can be categorised as "over organisers" (2008: 108).

[79] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php/Special:Contributions/Monkeyelf

[80] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=Sci-Fi_2B&diff=prev&oldid=7372

[81] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php/User:Sun_Tzu.

[82] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php/N Each page in this walled garden is a quote from Sun Tzu's work *The Art of War*.

[83] http://c2.com/cgi/wiki?WalledGarden

[84] The letters i, g, a and z along with the exclamation point had additional material added by users other Sun Tzu.

[85] http://emilylitcrit.blogspot.com/2008/03/wiki-novel-literature-or-not.html

[86] http://www.futureofthebook.org/blog/archives/2007/02/a_million_penguins_a_wikinovel.html

[87] See the discussion earlier in this report.

[88] http://amillionpenguins.com/blog/?p=22

[89] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php/Talk:Welcome

[90] http://amillionpenguinsanddmu.blogspot.com/2007/02/good-stuff.html

[91] http://amillionpenguinsanddmu.blogspot.com/2007/03/newsweek-talk-about-jeremy-editor-of.html

[92] http://amillionpenguins.com/blog/?p=28

[93] Multiple edits to the same page within a short period of time are considered to be editing on just one occasion. For example, the user My3graces (http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php/Special:Contributions/My3graces) made two edits to the "Welcome" article within 1 minute but no others.

[94] http://amillionpenguins.com/blog/?p=4

[95] http://amillionpenguins.com/blog/?p=21

[96] http://glenfarrelly.blogspot.com/2007/02/can-million-penguins-typing-away-create.html

[97] http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601088&refer=home&sid=asTAbFQZW83I

[98] http://chronicle.com/wiredcampus/index.php?id=1853

[99] http://arstechnica.com/news.ars/post/20070205-8769.html

[100] Posted February 20th on a private email list.

[101] http://101reasonstostopwriting.com/2007/02/12/weekend-update-51-the-wiki-effect/

[102] http://amillionpenguins.com/blog/?p=30

[103] See for example, Prahalad & Krishnan 2008; Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004

[104] http://www.futureofthebook.org/blog/archives/2007/02/a_million_penguins_a_wikinovel.html

[105] http://chronicle.com/wiredcampus/index.php?id=1853

[106] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php/User:Crtrue

[107] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php/User:Hight

[108] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=User:Hight&action=history

[109] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=User:Hight&oldid=10249

[110] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=User:Hight&oldid=10489

[111] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php?title=User:Hight&oldid=10674

[112] http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php/Special:Statistics

[113] These numbers are somewhat approximate in that it's not always clear whether a page has now, or had previously, any sort of significant content.

[114] Note that the Wikinovel has remained live since it was locked in March 2007 thus the statistics used in this report are all gathered from April 3rd, 2008. According to the Penguin Blog "75000 people have visited the site and there have been more than 280,000 page views" as of March 7th, 2007."
(http://amillionpenguins.com/blog/?p=28) Therefore, there have been more than 500,000 page views since the wiki closed.

[115] Statistics retrieved 3rd April 2008.

[116] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Backronym

[117] http://amillionpenguins.com/blog/?p=28

[118] These included the Penguin Books and DMU staff.

[119] I am counting multiple edits to the same page within a short period of time as an example of editing on just one occasion. For example, the user My3graces
(http://www.amillionpenguins.com/wiki/index.php/Special:Contributions/My3graces) made two edits to the "Welcome" article within 1 minute but no others.