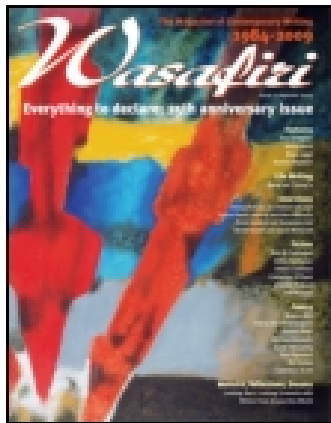


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# Quest for Immortality

ENTRIES FROM THE DIARY OF  
A BESTSELLING TWIN AUTHOR

Jyoti  
Guptara

*Jyoti Guptara is a British novelist of Indian origin who lives in Switzerland. Born with a twin on 22.11.88, the brothers published their first novel at the age of seventeen. The Insanity*

*trilogy has sold over 100,000 copies in four languages. Hobbies include defending civilisation against forces of darkness, and football. See <<http://www.twins.guptara.net>>.*

Age 5, Surrey, England. We have been in school for one year and it is boring. Ranji & Anjali already taught us to write, so I don't know what school is for. I can read about whatever I want to know. What I want to know is not what they teach.

We are waiting for the summer holidays to end. They are very long. I think it has something to do with the Second World War. Maybe the Germans bombed our school and they're repairing it. The best thing about holidays is Ranji comes home from Oxford. We dressed the toys and put on a play with Anjali.

6. School started again. I am waiting for the next summer holidays. At least we could go to India and see relatives and beggars. We learn more travelling than at school. The good news is they let us read more now. Books are magic; a whole world can fit inside the covers. You could only fit about one book inside your head with your hands, but you can put unlimitless books there through your eyes. I look at dad's library and think about how many worlds are sitting on the shelves. The most exciting books have yellow pages and smell like India.

7. Switzerland. We live five minutes from the German border. I am scared they will invade but Mama laughs and we even shop in Germany because it is cheaper and the border guard does not have a moustache. Ranji is back from boarding school at Christchurch Cathedral. His choristers recorded real

CDs and he wrote one of the songs. People actually still write classical music. I thought only modern music was being composed as classical composers died out. Ranji says anyone can write a song or even a book.

He and Anjali published poems when they were our age! I don't like poetry but maybe I can publish a book one day. After we act them, Suresh and I write adventure stories. If only we had enough ideas to write more than three chapters. Today Ranji painted a Warhammer dragon. Like expensive Lego but you can paint them and there are rules.

8. We moved house again, fifteen minutes further away from the Germans at the border, though they are obviously no longer a threat. We helped Ranji carefully pack his models. Before we are allowed Warhammer, Mama says we have to paint more pictures. I paint Thorin Oakenshield from *The Hobbit*. We have not put on a play for a while but we tell stories. Until we get Warhammer, we decided to act the figures. We come up with our own rules to go on adventures. This game is called Questus. It's better than the last game we invented, Skidball. Plus you can play it anywhere: driving through tunnels (when you're not allowed to read) and walking on the Alps. We draw maps of worlds for Questus.

9. Ranji gave us our own Warhammer models! Elves, Dwarfs and Knights. When they're on the battlefield it's just like a scene from Lewis or Tolkien come to life. Anjali gave us the *Star Wars* trilogy which we've already watched twice; so our new quests sometimes involve Jedi. But we don't go on Questus so much right now because we also just got Warcraft II, which is like animated Questus and is even better than Age of Empires II, Settlers II and Civilisation III!

10. A few weeks ago we read a good book called *Harry Potter*. It has different magic from other Fantasy and is well-suited for Questus. Not all good books have magic, they just have

adventures — like *Biggles* and *Swallows & Amazons*. Reading itself is the magic.

Life seems to involve an awful lot of waiting. As a child you can't DO anything. We have to wait for another year before school finishes and then we go to *another* school and then there is university before you start working. And who knows if work will be more interesting than school? Which is what you keep doing till you retire. I was very sad at this thought but it made Anjali laugh. She said it was 'a case of the world's youngest midlife crisis'. (That's when grown-ups get scared of dying.) Well, obviously reading is the solution. When you read, it's like living someone else's life. So if you want to live several times but are not a Hindu or a cat, you should read more.

Just saw a newspaper piece that another *Harry Potter* book is coming out, with more planned! The author is actually still alive. Most authors we like are dead, which is weird, because in their books they are still very much alive — immortal.

11. Guess which activity can open your eyes to all the fascinating debris around you? Tidying your room. You spend forever examining what for the last year you've been perfectly happy to ignore. One such pile is a stack of stories we wrote over the last few years. Maps, character sketches and a dozen first, second and third chapters. Finding pearls in this pigsty kindles my ambition. Quietly leaving Suresh to his tidying, I creep to the computer and begin typing. Eventually Suresh catches on and investigates the fruit of my treacherous labour — a single sentence. *Bryn Bellyset sat at his kitchen table enjoying a mug of freshly brewed chai*. Cool, he says, another story! No, says I, it's a book. Can he help? Of course; half the ideas in the pile are his. Signing a contract to split future royalties fifty fifty, we decide to stop starting stories we never finish and finally write a whole book.

12. We invented a world for Bryn: *Calaspia*. If that sounds like mixing 'Caspian' and his 'Narnia', there are allusions to other works too. LOTR begins with a birthday party and so does ours. Only it's not really Bryn's birthday ... This foreshadows the idea that, while there are similarities, echoes, these will end up in unexpected places. I suppose the publisher wasn't impressed though, because we never got an answer. At Christmas, we continue the family tradition of reading Shakespeare aloud, this time *The Merchant of Venice*. I'm Shylock: my daughter, my ducats!

The new school started promisingly but is boring again. Three more years! We escape the Maya of time and assuage burgeoning Wanderlust with more Questus. You can deliver justice, bring freedom to the oppressed, save the

world. The funniest quests so far have been with 'Plimps' — silly, furry creatures based on ... us. We always have been crazy. That's why we came up with 'Insanity' as the force of evil in *Calaspia*.

13. Suresh and I have become leaders in Scouts. It's a lot of work keeping the youngsters' attention with knot craft, creative challenges and stories. Sent *Bryn Bellyset* to a third round of publishers ... Last time at least some had the decency to reply. Now we are getting personalised rejections with feedback — 'engaging story but cardboard characters'. We talked about writing with the next round of guests, from Canada, who are here for dad's think tank. (When people ask what dad does, we can never explain — so some think he's a spy!)

15. Acting Viktor Krum in *Harry Potter 4* is the ambition that fuels my first website, my first travel to a new country alone (Bulgaria, for the casting) and the consequent threat of expulsion from school. While I am neither chosen nor expelled, it does also result in my first publication. Thirty minutes after *The Wall Street Journal* accepts my piece, a German textbook publisher calls; they want to print one of my school essays. Is this a hint from God?

After ten years of asking if I can quit, I am shocked when dad asks *me* if I want to leave school after the summer. Without thinking — yes. And just like that, I am perhaps the world's youngest full-time writer.

17. At last! An Indian publisher accepted *Conspiracy of Calaspia* (version 10.6)! Our agent auctioned German rights for a six-figure advance — to literary giant Rowohlt. As their first-ever Fantasy title, it's wonderful they recognise the maligned genre's capacity to be more than mere escapism, 'to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature'. One such reflection they find in our concept of *Insanity*, the corrupting energy that seeks to twist everything into a perversion of its original intention.

21. Back on tour with the German translation of *Calaspia* Book Three. Given 200 readings now — and to think I left school partly because I hated speaking German in front of audiences! Last week, I addressed a group of managers on 'escapism and its alternatives in education and economics'. 'Insanity' may be more difficult to visualise than Milton's Satan, but has turned out to be great at raising civilisational issues for discussion. That is the power of story, that is what makes the pen mightier than the sword, that is why it is worth taking the risk of spending one's life on writing.