

The Screwdisk E-Mail

**Excerpts from an online correspondence
transcribed by Skip Mendler**

*It has been more than fifty years since C. S. Lewis published his spiritual classic *The Screwtape Letters*. That work purports to be the correspondence sent by Screwtape, a senior devil, to his nephew Wormwood concerning the proper methods for leading a soul astray. Much has changed since those days, and much is new—nuclear weapons, the Internet, the roles of men and women—but much has remained the same. Hence the present work, which seeks to bring Lewis' timeless theme into this time, the last gasp of a millennium. —S. M.*

Introduction

Not long after "l'affaire Mitnick," in which a hacker was discovered to have secreted pirated files into other people's Internet accounts, I was checking through my holdings to be sure that there had been no tampering with my files. I found that indeed, some other files had been added to my home directory, apparently without the system administrators noticing. There was an unfamiliar directory title: "SCRWDSK", and a collection of files in that directory with filenames of the form "SCRDSK01.TXT".

I opened the files, and discovered text that had been heavily encrypted by a method that I had not seen before.... The headers seemed to be variants on standard IP headers—indeed, one header referred, not to IP, but to something called IMP—an Infernet Messaging Procedure. Yes, it said "Infernet," not "Internet"; this text appeared consistently in each file, and a vague sense of unease began to form in my heart as I examined the headers more closely. Instead of mailer daemons, the headers mentioned mailer demons, with names like Asphodel and Scabpicker. The subject lines that emerged bore topics like "Re: Using Politics as a Distraction from Spiritual Matters," or "Good Techniques for Inflaming Imagined Injustices." And the "From:" line said:

screwdisk@ninthcircle.hades.inf

The bodies of the messages were, as I have stated, harder to crack. Indeed, I am continuing to work on them. As I piece completed texts together, I will post them to this site....

The Screwdisk E-Mail, 1

Subject: Keeping him online--and on the hook

My dear Scumbucket,

Your last report raises some interesting questions about your patient's involvement in cyberspace. If he is just sitting in his apartment typing away, you ask, how can we get him to

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commit the sorts of crimes that will assure his eventual descent to the house of Our Infernal Father?

I sympathize with your situation, my little dumpling. I remember how, as a tempter-in-training myself, I fantasized endlessly about leading my prey into sins of incalculable import, having him cause suffering to thousands, indulging his basest desires... Like you, I was engrossed by the tales of our successes in the Dark Ages, the Crusades, the great wars. It took me some time to realize a few basic truths that make our present methodology so reliably successful.

You must always remember that **we are the default.** if he does nothing about his internal life, he will almost surely be ours. It is not necessary to bring about great mortal sins in your prey; indeed, sometimes that is the worst thing to do. We have lost incalculable numbers of souls by leading them into such morasses of sin that they see no way out for themselves and turn in desperation to our Enemy—who always seems to pull them out and grant them forgiveness! (How disgustingly generous.) No, it is far better to just make sure that he does not pay attention to such matters at all, for if he turns his attention neither "inward" or "upward", then our task will be simplicity itself.

So, your patient in his room with his computer may not be raping and pillaging in real life, but you can certainly encourage him to try out those behaviors in cyberspace! The effect on his soul will be similar, although not identical—and furthermore, his adventures, being imaginary, will be free of any trace of guilt or remorse that might prove troublesome later.

We are also finding that there is indeed quite a bit to be said for the theories of Wastedump and others, who maintained that increased isolation and insulation of humans from each other may be more productive than some of the mass-psychology techniques we have been utilizing in recent generations. Keep them apart and let them think they are connected. Your friend in his apartment will have limited real contact with his fellow beings which means that his feelings about them will be that much easier to control....

As ever, your dotting great-uncle,
Screwdisk

The Screwdisk E-Mail, 10
Subject: writer's block

My dear Scumbucket,

Oh yes, the creative ones can be the hardest. Unpredictable, likely to see through our stratagems, very very difficult to manage. For this reason, we try to minimize their numbers—but somehow or another, despite our best efforts to date, that pernicious spark still manages to peep out in the most unlikely circumstances.

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But there are ways to deal with them. For example—you may not be able to control the occurrence of creativity, but you can help to ensure that it never amounts to anything. I find the following scenario handy: say your subject is taking a long drive. His mind wanders, as it will, and the Enemy may sneak in the occasional seed of an idea that, if followed up on, could be detrimental to our purposes—say, an essay, a poem, a song, or some way to address a problem in his life. If you can't stop the creative process at this point by misdirection or distraction, or by bringing up an unpleasant memory or an unrelated fantasy, go ahead and let the process go. He could compose the whole thing, play out the whole scenario, right there in his car—just be sure that he hasn't brought a pencil along, or that he doesn't remember where it is.

Then, when he reemerges from his reverie into everyday life, let the normal hubbub that we have built into the environment work for you. Keep him hopping from one crisis to the other, and every once in a while let him remember this much—that he has something **really important** to attend to, if only he could rid himself of these constant annoyances and get himself together. Cultivate the resentment that will follow naturally, that he is not being allowed to pursue his Muse, or have the time he needs to himself to do this really good thing (whatever it was) that he had had in mind. He may even be provoked to alienating friends and family, just to try and get a few moments for himself so that he can recapture that germ of an idea, get himself organized. We will not let him steal the time from his workplace (be sure that workplace pressures, and the manager's surveillance, increase at times like this), so it must be stolen from either his family or the Enemy. Let him, perhaps, decide that instead of going to church some Sunday morning, he will try to worship via the creative process or some such nonsense. Then, once he has pulled away from everything, and has himself all ready **then** shut the door.

At this point, despair is only a few simple steps away. More on this another time.

As ever,
Screwdisk

Skip Mendler is a member of North Branch Monthly Meeting, Philadelphia YM. When not online, on the mat, or in his cubicle, Skip may be found in transit, in clown garb, at the microphone, on the carpet, behind schedule, over his head, in cahoots—or, every once in a while, at center.

The collection from which these excerpts are taken may be found on Skip's web site, [This Friend's Electric](#).

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