

The Public Square for August 2026

Attention Citizens!

Writing!

I've been struggling to get a handle on what I want for the next video. The research is all done, but digesting and putting it into a comprehensible format for human consumption is the current challenge.

For a long time I couldn't figure out where exactly I wanted the video to begin and end. My research just kinda starts and just kinda tapers off, I never settled on firm cutoffs. I struggled for many days to get into the topic by providing a brief historical overview to the audience, but I kept writing myself into the same cul-de-sac where I would spend hours writing about what I wanted to write about, but never actually writing about it. I took several cracks at this, but always fell into the same trap.

So after many failed days at this, I took out all of my notes, went through everything line-by-line, and reorganized everything from scratch. This took a stupidly long time, but I came out of that process with a really strong outline (with everything in a significantly different order,) a really good sense of what I want the video to feel like, and a solid idea for the ending. I also found a few blind spots in the research, so I spent some time filling those holes in. It was worth it.

My currently outline has 13 sections, and I really didn't want to get stuck in the same introductory cul-de-sac again, so I started writing section #5 first and have been slowly working my way out from there.

Still on working on Draft 1, which is why I'm only putting the progress at 10%, but at least now I'm moving forward, no longer getting stuck in the same writing cul-de-sacs over and over and over again.

PROGRESS UPDATE:

Video #89:

RESEARCH	WRITING	AUDIO	ANIMATION	PATREON	YOUTUBE

Video #90:

	10%				
RESEARCH	WRITING	AUDIO	ANIMATION	PATREON	YOUTUBE

*Updated on Sundays

Q&A:

Nathan Sobel asks... “On paper, war elephants in ancient battles should be effective in terms of fear and force in battle. However, in practice, elephants always seem to get scared, trample allied soldiers, and be easily dealt with using volleys of projectiles. In ancient major battles, elephants seem to do more harm than good, save for the Battle of Ipsus in 301 BC. With all of the elephant mayhem, why did commanders keep trying to use war elephants? Is it because the times they were useful aren't historically notable?”

For so much of ancient warfare, the rule of thumb was usually “whoever breaks first, loses.” That’s why the Romans were incredibly effective, they so rarely broke. You’re right, war elephants don’t have a great track record with major historical battles, but they were effective during minor engagements, causing less organized enemies to instantly break. Thinking specifically about Carthage, I get the sense that they had so much success with “I show up with war elephants, the enemy breaks, I win,” that they didn’t really know what to do with them if the enemy put up a fight and they actually had to use them in battle. But yeah, in the grand scheme of things, I would argue that they were mostly useless. If I ever get the opportunity to be a time traveller advising an ancient army, I will tell them that “every coin spent on a war elephant might as well be thrown right into the ocean.”

IF YOU HAVE A QUESTION FOR NEXT MONTH, LEAVE IT AS A RESPONSE TO THIS POST OVER ON PATREON.

Books I’ve Recently Enjoyed:

- **The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien (1981), collected by Humphrey Carpenter**
 - This has been sitting half-read on my bookshelf for approximately 100 years, finally decided to go back to it and see what The Professor had to say.

As far as I can tell, Tolkien's favourite hobby was procrastination, and every time he procrastinated a little too close to the sun and missed a deadline with his publisher, he would hit him up with a UGH I'VE BEEN SO TERRIBLY SICK LATELY I COULDN'T EVEN GET OUT OF BED letter. He would pull this trick several times in a calendar year. Relatable!

- **The Grand Alliance (1950), by Winston Churchill**

- This is Volume 3 in Churchill's 6-volume account of World War II. This one covers 1941. I've resolved to read all 6, they're very entertainingly written, and it goes almost day-by-day, and includes all of Churchill's private correspondence. Of course he's writing his own first draft of history so he's omitting anything that makes him look bad, but it's still a lot of fun.

When thinking about 1941, this year is of course dominated by the Germany invading the Soviet Union in June, and the United States being attacked by Japan in December. But what I've noticed, going almost day-by-day through this year, is that before Germany invades the Soviet Union in 1941, Britain was kinda behaving like they lost the war. I had never fully locked onto this before, but looking at it through Churchill's eyes it becomes really clear to me. They had successfully repelled Germany's air attacks the previous year, so they were not in imminent danger of an invasion, but they had almost no freedom of movement anywhere else in the world. They couldn't hold Greece, they couldn't hold Crete, they couldn't get anything done in North Africa, they had no hope of holding anything in Asia, and they were in the process of losing the Atlantic. Reading about their struggles in like, April of 1941, it suddenly became crystal clear to me, "oh, Britain has fully lost this war. They're just refusing to surrender right now, but they've fully lost, it's over."

Fun read!

Films I've Recently Enjoyed:

- **The Odyssey (2026)**

- My biggest takeaway from this movie was that it was a genius work of adaptation.

Nolan makes significant changes to the poem, and I would argue that every significant change makes the work more compelling to a movie audience seeing it in 2026. One of the reasons that **The Odyssey** poem is so strange and unique is that it is ambiguously anti-war. Or maybe it would be more accurate to say that it's sometimes pro-war, and sometimes anti-war. The movie **The Odyssey (2026)** is UNAMBIGUOUSLY anti-war. What makes it a really interesting piece of adaptation is that it's anti-war in totally different ways from the poem. In fact, in its

changes, **The Odyssey (2026)** is not really in dialogue with the poem, it's in dialogue with us, the audience.

Making a true anti-war film is so difficult. Warfare is inherently cinematic, and so depicting it on screen, even with the best of anti-war intentions, has the effect of justifying it, or excusing it, or even romanticizing it.

Think **Saving Private Ryan (1998)**. The beginning of that movie is trying to say something about the unthinkable horrors of war, and is trying to de-romanticize the D-Day landings. In other words, it's trying to do something that's BROADLY gesturing in an anti-war direction. But by the end of that movie? Hell nah. Even Tom Hanks, our most anti-war character, finally accepts that the purpose of his life is NOT to make it home to his wife, but instead it is to die in glorious battle.

My biggest criticism of the movies of **The Lord of the Rings (2001-2003)** is similar, they took an unambiguously anti-war book and turned it into unambiguously pro-war movies. It's so difficult to pull this off. Putting warfare on screen just tilts everything in a pro-war direction.

Somehow, Nolan was able to turn **The Odyssey** into an unambiguously anti-war movie, which is a goddamned miracle. It would have been so easy to make the same mistakes that **The Lord of the Rings (2001-2003)** made. Like I said earlier, it's a genius work of adaptation.

Ripping 99% of the "god stuff" out of the movie was such an important decision. It only really works as an anti-war movie if humans are understood to be fully responsible for their own actions. If you go through and remember every "supernatural" scene, humans are fully responsible for all of their actions. If all of the "god stuff" was left in, it would have been so easy to fall back into discussions of fate and destiny and whatnot, which leads you right back into a pro-war trap.

Did I like it when Nolan directly tied the fall of Troy to the Bronze Age Collapse? You bet I did. Did I like it when he brought up the Sea Peoples? You bet I did. Did I like the bit that everybody's making fun of at the very end about rebuilding civilization and preserving writing? You bet I did.

Anyways, **The Odyssey (2026)** was incredible.

- **Megadoc (2025)**

- Listen, this documentary about the making of **Megalopolis (2024)** isn't THAT good, but **Megalopolis (2024)** isn't that good either, so it does enter the rare canon

of documentaries about movies that are better than the movies they're covering. **Burden of Dreams (1982)** is the King of this category, with all due respect to **Fitzcarraldo (1982)**.

- **For All Mankind (1989)**
 - My first time seeing this! Fun! Did I learn anything about the Apollo missions that I didn't already know? Not really! But very entertaining!
- **Turn Every Page - The Adventures of Robert Caro and Robert Gottlieb (2022)**
 - My Two Goats.

Music I've Recently Enjoyed:

- **Kathleen Edwards**
 - Been a huge fan of **Kathleen Edwards** for many years, finally caught up with her most recent album, **Billionaire (2025)**, which I really liked. Felt inspired, I've been listening to all of her old albums all month.

I've always been really impressed by Edwards. When she found that she wasn't enjoying the music industry anymore, she very publicly "retired" and opened a coffee shop called Quitters outside of Ottawa in 2014. That's one of those things that people always talk about, but nobody has the guts to actually do it. It's the coolest thing anybody has ever done. She has since "un-retired," and ever since coming back, her songwriting has been extremely strong. In my opinion, anyways.

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