

Hi everyone. I've been asked if any of my characters are inspired by real, living people.

Yes. All of them. But I think every character who has ever been written is "based on real people." Truly inventing a person, like making a whole Eve out of nothin' but a rib, would require a deity. I am *not* a deity. So I need a bit more material to work with. And I think everyone writes this way. Like police sketch artists: the descriptions are real, but what we draw on the page is half invented. We cobble together characters from the features of our communities. Maybe we combine them in novel ways, but no character is *totally* original. And the best among them (e.g., Ignatius Reilly) seem to be the most real. At least to me. Which is why I take my sketch artistry so seriously, illustrating as realistically as I can. The easiest way to ensoul a literary character, I've found, is to borrow the soul of a real person. "It's not like *they* were doing anything with it", I justify the reappropriations. "I'm actually going to put it to use, really make something of its life", I continue, because my first justification didn't fully absolve my guilt.

So, again: yes. My characters do have a soulmate in the real world. But it's not always obvious. Even if you're a careful reader *and* know the character's inspiration.

My friend Fred, for example. The same Fred from Journal 25. Who was he in my life? Gandalf, Dumbledore, Obi-wan... etc. The list is long. Wise, old mentor may be the biggest sci-fi cliché there is, but it's a true rarity in the real world. Salà had Leonardo. And he pissed it away. I had Fred, and I managed to hold in some of my piss. I could have worked harder, been more focused, gained more from his guidance. But if I had done those things, it wouldn't have been the cliché: a flawed protagonist who fails to actualize his potential when he has the chance. Without the recklessness of youth, there's no story to tell. And that story has already been told a million times. Just consult any book on the sci-fi shelf. But in real life, this kind of mentorship is awfully rare. Probably one in a million. And I was one of them. So... does this character appear in *my* book? No. It wouldn't have worked. One of the most personal and intimate relationships I've ever had would be represented in an impersonal and timite way (it seemed reasonable, in an algebraic sense, to cancel the double negative in inintimate).

That doesn't mean I purged Fred from my roster of influences. He's there. Pretty prominently. Never as a wise, old mentor, but a sketch artist likeness of him does make appearances elsewhere. As a chef, for instance. In Book 2, there's a debate between two chefs. This is representative of Fred's and my relationship today. We undertake long, elaborate arguments, parsing our opposing premises to death until, after a series of exhausting redefinitions, we finally arrive at a disappointing compromise. But, in the end, we've both learned a little bit more about ourselves. Or at least that feels true for me. And the productivity of the exchange makes it worth repeating.

I guess I should just post one of our email exchanges. There are a thousand I could choose from. [This one](#) seems a reasonable choice (the reason will be obvious to anyone who gets through it). And now, when you encounter Book 2's quarreling chefs, you'll know the inspiration was Gandalf.

