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Kuro5hin: Online Moderation and the Democratization of the Editor

While proponents are correct in describing the Internet as a medium where everyone is a publisher, producing a piece of literature—in both the print and digital worlds—does not mean that anyone will read it. Because the barriers to digital publishing are so low, most web-based literature rots in obscurity; experts have estimated that two to three percent of the web sites on the Internet generate more than ninety-five percent of all traffic. While critics, editors, journalists, librarians, and reviewers have helped readers select printed reading materials, online literature has simply translated these mechanisms into cyberspace. However, the programmers and designers behind the web site Kuro5hin (pronounced *corrosion* but often abbreviated as K5) have developed a model for an online literary community that has begun to succeed in flipping this top-down model of literary selection on its head.

Superficially, Kuro5hin appears similar to other weblogs¹. However, while weblogs have traditionally relied on a small group of editors or administrators to create or select content, Kuro5hin blurs the lines between readers, critics, writers, and publishers through the use of an "open submission queue."² Like many other weblogs (and traditional publishing companies), readers can submit essays, stories, and news items. Unlike other forms of publishing, K5 readers can also read, discuss, and vote (either for or against) submitted stories. As a story gains votes, it becomes more visible throughout the site.

In describing literary creation and distribution on the web as non-exclusive processes, many proponents of Internet publishing focus on the democratizing power of the web. However, these proponents seem to take the benefits of editorial selection in the world of print for granted. Most readers are interested in reading *only* the best literature and flock to the *most* selective literary magazines and web sites. Kuro5hin is unique in that it acts to maintain the democratic nature of Internet publishing while allowing for several levels of selectivity based on a democratic editorial process. Within K5 there is no censorship and, at some level of the site, K5 publishes *everything* by *everybody*--it's all there, you just might have to dig for it.

Kuro5hin works because it facilitates readers of widely varying degrees of involvement--everyone *can* be an editor or an author but not everyone *must* be. Most of K5's readers have never voted for a story or visited the submission queue. Many may never know the extent of their "power" or care that they don't. However, if one of these readers doesn't like the editorial bent the site seems to be taking, they can become involved in the discussions of submissions and can vote articles in or out. Ultimately, if a group of readers feels they are being overwhelmed and under-represented within K5 they can start their own community using the Kuro5hin model³.

Finally, it is important to note that Kuro5hin itself grows and changes through the same democratic process. There is a sub-section on K5 for the discussion of K5 features changes. This is representative of the fact that the division between K5's users and developers is also an intentionally blurred one. The K5 community is aware that literature as a democratic process on any large scale is at once promising and prohibitively overwhelming. Conscious of this, Kuro5hin is step in the right direction in that it avoids traditional or "editorial" censorship while

letting readers be only as overwhelmed as they desire. Successfully or unsuccessfully, explicitly or inexplicitly, Kuro5hin is inventing new literary tools to create a new type of reader.

Notes

1. The term "weblog" refers to a popular type of web site pioneered by *Slashdot.org*. Slashdot posts a small number (usually between eight and sixteen) articles or stories and then provides a forum connected to each story for readers to comment, respond, and discuss the story posted. Slashdot made the software behind the site freely available and spawned countless sites on a variety of topics and variant versions of the software. A local examples of a weblog include Hampshire College's *grep* project (<http://grep.hampshire.edu/>).
2. The queue is only one type of reader-involvement employed by Kuro5hin. Moderation is also applied toward comments in the discussion forums linked to each story. While the system is quite complex, the goal is for insightful, interesting, or humorous comments to become most visible while inflammatory, off-topic, and offensive comments are be marked down—all in accords with community consensus. A particular users history will also factor into the way their comments are initially displayed to other users. However, treatment of user commentary is outside scope of this essay.
3. Kuro5hin runs on a piece a software called *scoop* written by the programmer who started Kuro5hin. However, the software is licensed freely which means it is free to use, distribute, modify, and redistribute one's changes. This means that any group of K5 readers can use the software, at no cost, to easily create a K5-like site within their own community. This has happened several times already.

Works Cited

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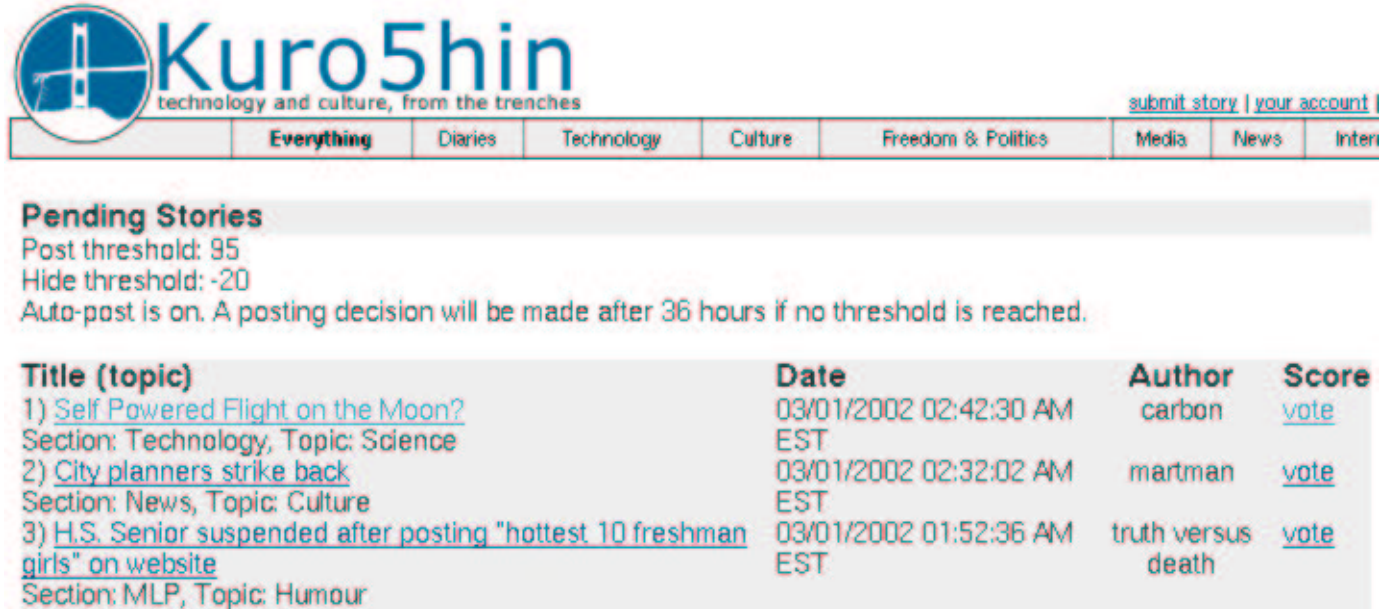
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Figures

Figure 1 –Screen shot of the Kuro5hin open submission queue.



Kuro5hin
technology and culture, from the trenches

[submit story](#) | [your account](#)

Everything | Diaries | Technology | Culture | Freedom & Politics | Media | News | International

Pending Stories

Post threshold: 85
Hide threshold: -20
Auto-post is on. A posting decision will be made after 36 hours if no threshold is reached.

Title (topic)	Date	Author	Score
1) Self Powered Flight on the Moon? Section: Technology, Topic: Science	03/01/2002 02:42:30 AM EST	carbon	vote
2) City planners strike back Section: News, Topic: Culture	03/01/2002 02:32:02 AM EST	martman	vote
3) H.S. Senior suspended after posting "hottest 10 freshman girls" on website Section: MLP, Topic: Humour	03/01/2002 01:52:36 AM EST	truth versus death	vote

Figure 2 –A snapshot of the readers side-bar that shows the options available to each reader.



makolee

- [Moderate Submissions \(3/9\)](#)
- [User Info](#)
- [Your Comments](#)
- [Your Stories](#)
- [Your Diary](#)
- [New Diary Entry](#)
- [User Preferences](#)
- [Display Preferences](#)
- [Comment Preferences](#)
- [Logout makolee](#)

Figure 3 - A picture of the moderate story options for a story in the queue.

