

**“Smithers” by James ‘Baz’ Barrett and Peter Mabbott**  
**Read by Baz, supported by Catherine Ward**

Matthew -- Smithers to his friends in London -- was a perfectionist. Time and again he would pour hours of effort into something, only to tear it all down and start again because he saw a flaw -- producing something even better as a result. That drive for perfection in his own life and his own behaviour translated into a kind of deep and thoughtful carefulness in how he treated other people. He had no problem at all with spending vast amounts of his time helping out another person, whether they were his best friend or someone he'd just met -- and he always did it with a friendly smile and a humble self-deprecation which made it almost impossible not to like him.

That self-deprecation and modesty may have been almost his only real flaws. He was a talented artist, but never believed himself to be one. He always compared his work unfavourably to the very best professional artists out there who had spent years perfecting their trade. He was also an excellent engineer, and a vigorous advocate for nuclear power. He would argue that nuclear power was the only real alternative to ever increasing use of coal -- and that the environmental price of not taking the nuclear route was far too great. He was at heart an optimist and believed that mankind could not help but transcend its problems and limitations. Again and again he would say that the thing we really need to keep in mind when discussing the idea of progress was that the Industrial revolution and the developments which have come since have meaningfully and measurably improved the lot of the majority of human beings. He believed in better living through science and technology. He believed in leaving the Earth behind and moving out into space. Possibly the biggest and most difficult decision he ever made was whether to put his efforts into space or the nuclear industry. He thought that the future was going to be wonderful and intended to have a hand in taking us there.

I think it was this love of science and technology and his optimism about the future which led him to a love of science fiction. Many of his friends, including myself, first met him through the Imperial College Science Fiction Society, and he became a major and active member. He edited the Society's newsletter for two years and produced "Zenith" -- a collection of original fiction and artwork written by members of the society including several of his own pieces. He later became chair of the society -- though I think he enjoyed being editor more: he never shirked from responsibility, but also disliked having to tell people what to do. During the summer before he took over as chair he spearheaded an effort to get the old and decrepit shelving in the Society's library replaced by a beautiful clean, tidy, elegant custom-made installation in Norwegian Pine. He designed a 3D-model of the room accurate down to the positioning of the

pipe-work and the fittings and used it to produce an amazing presentation showing various options for the library refit with details and prices, and he and Peter Mabbott presented it to a series of charitable trusts in the hope of obtaining part of the necessary funding. Impressed, they happily handed over enough money to fit the most ambitious of the designs and have enough left over to also expand the society's collection. One of the first new things which was bought was one of his all-time favourite television series on DVD: Neon Genesis Evangelion.

He was a huge fan of Japanese animation, Japanese food, Japanese design aesthetics, and all things Japanese. He bought his stationery from Muji, and his clothes from Uni-Qlo. He was saving up to visit Tokyo. I like to think he would have loved it.

I'm very glad that his final weekend was one he greatly enjoyed. He came down to London on the Friday evening (as he often did) and attended a party at Peter's house. Whilst there he myself and Dave Bartram engaged in a long conversation about a new project which we were embarking on -- one which had him designing speculative fusion powered space-craft and searching through online stellar catalogues for a star within a few light-years of the Sun which has two Gas-giants with liquid water clouds (he found one: Gliese-876). On the Saturday we completed what he described as "An awesome season finale" in our weekly roleplaying game, and on the Sunday we played a thoroughly enjoyable game of dungeons and dragons -- although as usual more time was spent making jokes than actually playing.

Goodbye Smithers. We're going to miss you terribly. We're not the people we were before we met you, and without a doubt we are better people for having known you.