

Nam Backwards

Child of the future. Geriatric of the past.

Nam Backwards was a backwards man. This is not to say that he went about things in a clumsy or plebeian manner, but that he literally went backwards. In time. From his birth on the sixth of February 2003 his body clock went the wrong way (anticlockwise), but he didn't know any better (so to his wisdom the clock was completely wise, yet to us the clock wouldn't have any kind of wisdom whatsoever). To state that he was in all other respects an ordinary man is perhaps downplaying his absolute disregard for the infinite one-way signs that decorate the street of time. And the traffic warden called 'Science' and the traffic policeman called 'God'.

He lived his life going backwards in time. He was in all other respects an ordinary man. Countering the customary currents of time, Nam Backwards – or Nodrog Eoj, as was his actual name¹ - walked, talked, ate, developed, grew, thought, laughed and lived. Just backwards. It's actually quite a simple concept to grasp *once* you've understood that to him everything happens quite normally and similarly to us. That is, it's quite a simple concept to grasp *until* you try to view him from our perspective and try to work out exactly how he does *anything*.

Not only is this a story about mind-mangling causality and ridiculous indulgence in writing words backwards, it is also a story about death, love, and birth (in that order, but reversed for the sake of literary convention and the accurate portrayal of one man's perspective). Our cause his effect, his effect our cause, with his back to the future – our future, his past – Nam Backwards grew into the happy wise man who eventually died in 1933.

This is the story of his efil².



Father Emit and Mother Erutan had quite a hard time. First, one random day, Erutan saw a stranger walk into her house. He seemed to open the locked front door and approach her, with his back taking the lead. Erutan thought it was a slimy burglar dwarf, walking backwards in order to conceal his identity. So she tried to pummel the intruder with a hat stand. The dwarf evaded her every thrust in the most bizarrely skilled manner Erutan had ever witnessed. He surely was a genius, she thought, and shrieked for Emit. Emit came a-running and saw the strange-gaited dwarf straight away.

“Pesky dwarves, all over the place!” he cried, and hurled an umbrella stand at the accused short one. He hit him. An odd thing happened just before the umbrella stand hit the supposed dwarf. He appeared to seize up, and then after the direct hit was running backwards at full pace again. It was a terrific performance, thought Erutan, who only just then observed the all-important visage of this backwards man.

And he wasn't a man at all. Not even just a dwarf.

He was a toddler.

Erutan bade her husband to stop throwing hallway furniture at the toddler. He gave up, but not without a bit of protest. He had been rather enjoying himself.

¹ 'Nam Backwards' was his self-chosen superhero name.

² Read: life.

Then the most curious thing happened. It was, at least, the most curious thing since a hair-faced thief had broken into their house. The toddler struggled to the side of Erutan and then caught hold of her. Quicker than she could have resisted, and in such a way she had never experienced before in her life. The embrace itself was a shuffled muddle, and awkward at that. Somehow though, it put her at ease. She realised that this jerky being she held in her arms was just a little toddler and didn't mean any harm. After a few seconds the toddler threw his arms out and away from the stomach he had nestled into, and tottered backwards.

He then did a very similar thing to Emit, who was still quite in the mood for protecting his household with projectile attacks.

Once again, the toddler threw his arms out and tottered backwards. He proceeded to run backwards up the stairs (faster than Emit had ever believed possible – and he'd tried his best) and was out of sight.

"Well, what do you think that was all about?" said Emit.

"I think we better shut the door," said his wife, quite nonplussed but quite delighted, "I think that's one of those stray orphan boys."

"Stray orphan boys?" said a mildly furious Emit.

"Yes. I saw something on the news about it," reassured Erutan.

"That was stray *cats!*" fumed Emit, running up the stairs.

"What's the difference, let's keep him!" said Erutan, who had decided during that first hug that she was going to keep the little scamp.

"We can't just take in a toddler!" Emit said, while slamming his hand on the banister.

"But otherwise he'll end up eating dead rats and sour milk on the cold streets of London!"

"He's not a pesky cat!" he shouted, but he seemed too wary of entering the spare room where the toddler had wandered (backwards) to.

"But he'll do!" she said, "Besides, don't you think it's worse for a kid to be eating dead rats and sour milk, than a cat?"

"Toddlers eating cats! Heavens above, woman!" he said, wiping his sweaty brow with his handkerchief, "We don't know the little blighter!"

"But he's the best toddler who's ever walked into our house!" she said, quite truthfully.

"He's the *only* toddler who's ever walked into our house! And the only one who's walked *backwards* on top of that!"

"You know how much I've wanted a child!" she yelled, with much sincere emotion.

And there were many things he could have said in reply. For example: this wasn't the way to go about it. You didn't just wait around for a child. Children didn't choose *you*.

But he had had enough, and she had somehow won the argument.

"We'll keep him," he said.

"What shall we call him?" she swiftly replied, having expected her lovely husband's acquiescence.

"We'll call him Joe Gordon, after the boy who lives down the road who looks rather splendid," Emit said, for he had always wanted to name a child after that elegant boy.

"Agreed," she said, with a happy nod.

So it was set.

The couple then walked together to the spare room the toddler had chosen. He had closed the door behind him. Emit opened the door and the pair held their breath.

Once they'd opened the door, they'd forgotten all about their breaths.

For the room was no longer 'spare'. It was being quite used. It was full of things that they'd never seen – at least not for a long time. Around the room, sprawled out on the floor, were all manner of things. Erutan recognised them as bits and bobs she knew had been kept in the cupboards for a long time. Children's toys and such. As a primary school teacher, she'd collected a few things through the course of her job – she's always wanted a child of her own and had been trying (her hardest) for just coming up to a year.

But there – taking colourful items from out of her cupboards and delicately placing them in heaps in the room – was a little child. Who she'd called her own / Joe Gordon.

And it's at this point (or perhaps sooner) where you might realise: the life of this toddler – of Nam Backwards – was a very confusing one. It rarely made much sense. Yet shouldn't senseless lives be respected just as much as commonplace, understandable ones? And is this an issue we can sensibly discuss? And if not, why? And if why, not?

Oblivious to all of this, the toddler started to reverse play with his toys.

He also continued to grow slightly, slightly smaller.

Such would be the trend and such would soon be noticed by Emit and Erutan. They had won themselves a child, but they weren't to see him grow up. They were going to see him grow *down*.

At some point or other, this began to worry them.

Both Emit and Erutan were reasonably familiar with unfamiliar features. Emit's face looked uncannily like a (albeit red) snowman's face – his nose was even a shade of carrot-orange – and if you saw Erutan you probably would have thought one of her hobbies was collecting and cherishing facial imperfections. Warts, blemishes, hairs, birthmarks, pouches of gristle – all of the classics.

They also had their fair number of habits and idiosyncrasies. Emit chased woodlice and organised team woodlice battle sports in his garden. Erutan supplied the refreshments. They did a ludicrous number of ludicrous things.

However, they'd never met someone before who lived backwards. They didn't realise it straight away but they had their suspicions from the start.

He walked backwards.

He threw backwards.

He laughed backwards.

He grew backwards.

He ate backwards.

Just to elaborate on a few of these – first, eating backwards. Since they'd nominated themselves as Joe Gordon's keeper, they thought it only best to feed him so as to keep him alive. One day, they left a saucer of applesauce out in his room. Only a little bit of applesauce, mind. From the second they put the saucer down Nam was there, holding it.

Eating backwards.

You've all seen this before. Sometimes it goes under the name of 'chundering' or 'vomiting' or 'regurgitating'. This is what it seemed like to Erutan and Emit.

It was polite chundering though. Nam withdrew dollop after dollop of applesauce from his bulging cheeks and laid them down in the applesauce. The pile of applesauce mounted. Until he had appeared to finish removing the food from his mouth, and backed away from the saucer, pointing at it throughout.

The saucer now had a very large amount of applesauce on it, on top of the applesauce originally put on by Erutan and Emit.

Erutan and Emit were gob smacked. In fact, their gobs were being brutally smacked from both sides of time – the past and the future were taking smacks in turn. The parents were deeply puzzled after such smacking. Puzzled about many fundamental things.

Puzzled greatly about one thing. *Whence* had this applesauce come?

To this day, nobody has been able to answer this question.

The applesauce's origins remain a mystery.

Thanks to Nam Backwards, the whereabouts of a fair number of billion particles are either unaccounted for or living tax-free.

Please feel free to ponder the source of the sauce.

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One leading explanation of this is the Matter Time War Theory of Space-Time Bidirectionality. Basically, it holds: the direction that objects move through time is dealt with by a mass “tug o’ war” between competing forces. Since most people are quite obsessed with the common ‘forwards’ in time motion, this is the way in which most matter travels, at a smooth steady speed, through time. This is just for convenience, really - imagine your house suddenly deciding to go backwards in time. Imagine if a hoodlum stole your wallet and took it back to an ‘80s hideaway. You’d never see it again, that’s for sure. Or is it?

For more on this matter of matter, please see ‘The Science Behind Nam Backwards’, a DVD extra on the new multimedia package.

Nevertheless, Nam was going backwards in time and he was damned if he wasn’t taking some stuff with him. It was only fair – we have all learnt how we must respect the rights of minorities. So Nam took with him his body, his clothes, and whatever else he could lay his hands on. He managed to smuggle quite a hoard of oxygen back in time.

The upshot of all this particle time-displacement is, again, confusion. Academics have labelled one particular kind of confusion the ‘Reality-Relay Multidimensional Bitch of a Problem’. The argument goes like this: if at Time 1 there are 3 units of oxygen, and then at Time 2 somebody picks up some oxygen and takes it back to Time 1, then at Time 1 there are 4 units of oxygen¹. In other words, at one moment in time there are different amounts of something. In other words, *what?* This is why the cutting edge movement concerned with this phenomenon have chosen to opt out of physical theorising, and have instead chosen to label Nam Backwards as a ‘troublemaker’ and leave it at that.

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¹ One approach is to see the first ‘Time 1’ as nonexistent since it is not the result of all the forces acting on it i.e. including the effect of the backwards time traveller. The second ‘Time 1’ is then the correct version, with there being 4 units of oxygen in Time 1 and less oxygen in Time 2. This is the approach that has been accepted for the purposes of this story, sort of, in a very wishy-washy way.

Erutan and Emit continued to love their child. They were as caring and committed as parents could be – especially admirable considering they’d already seen him leave the family nest as a healthy toddler. Nam got smaller and smaller as he immatured.

Soon he was but a baby.

Then he was but a blood n’ guts covered baby.

Erutan found, after washing her hands, that she too had blood n’ guts all over her.

Then the blood n’ guts covered baby leaped up toward Erutan, legs first, and settled into Erutan’s womb, causing much distress on her part. Hours and hours of distress. Maybe not all women are ready to cope with childbirth, but reverse childbirth is not something many women should have to go through.

Erutan bore it out and got quite used to the bulging stomach her toddler-turned-baby-turned-foetus inhabited.

As time passed, the bulge got smaller. Emit was so absolutely bewildered by all of the happenings of the past few years that he’d taken to Whiskey and obsessive hand-holding. The hand was Erutan’s, and she appreciated it.

Soon there was no bulge and no baby to speak of. To them, their son Joe Gordon had completely disappeared into the impenetrable mists of time.

Then they both enjoyed the fun part.

And Nam Backwards was conceived.



To Nam, his upbringing was at first unexceptional. He didn’t know any better. He didn’t have any friends other than his parents – they thought his condition might be contagious, and more importantly didn’t want everyone to know their secret. He learnt to associate things, in the same way as any other kid would, and to him this seemed forwards. He would pick up a toy aeroplane and throw it and have a whale of a time. It was only onlookers like Erutan and Emit who had problems with it, for example when they saw a plane pick itself up and fly itself backwards into their child’s hands.

Because of the immense compassion and attention Emit and Erutan paid Nam, he had a happy childhood. He ate well, he played well, and he learnt well enough. He learnt simple things like if somebody went into the small room (the toilet) looking satisfied they’d come out looking discomfited. He learnt that his name was ‘Nodrog Eoj’.

But he had to deal with something no other child has to deal with, without being aware that no other child had to deal with it. That is – the things he did weren’t the same things others did. He knew that if he threw an aeroplane, it would hit the floor and he’d have a whale of a time. But if one of his parents tried to throw an aeroplane, instead it’d fly up from the ground and into their hands. This is why Nam soon realised that he *was* exceptional. He had his own rules, his own way of doing things – namely the reverse way. He fully realised this when he was about three and a half, which is quite impressive considering how at this age the kind of profound realisations most children get are that pooh can be wiped, and dogs like biscuits.

He got the same feeling that you’ve probably experienced, where you’re walking one way and hundreds of people are walking the other way, and you’re

finding it difficult to go against the grain, and think, “Hang on... something’s up here.”

Just as, in such a situation, you have to learn how to do things differently if going against a tide of conformists, than going with them (more dodging and shoving), Nam learnt different techniques to your average toddler.

And, one day, after hugging goodbye to his parents, Nam left the house, aged four, ready to adventure and fend for himself. He got hit by an umbrella stand on the way. Then he opened the door and there was the world.

To try to visualise what he saw, look at a video in rewind and try to imagine that that’s normal and all you’re used to.

He stepped out of the door. He stepped, as he always did, back in time – to a time where Erutan and Emit knew absolutely nothing of him. And he didn’t look back. Well, he did, in his memory, but memory pales in comparison to the forward-rolling sensations of a child.

In the next ten years he was to learn a great deal.

He could steal food anywhere and nobody would know. Before he stole food, of course, the owner of the food looked distressed. After all, they were just about to lose their sausages.

He could understand language. To an extent. He got the last bit first, then the middle bit backwards, then the first bit last. It was like listening to a Frenchman say ‘wine red’¹ – only, to a Frenchman, so it seemed fine, and not backwards. But taken to extremes. And this is how he understood how people talked.

He also learnt to talk this way. He had to always start right at the end of what he wanted to say, and talk absolutely backwards. He said goodbye first, and hello later. This took time to master - it is difficult enough to predict the course of a future conversation, never mind one that, for the other party, has already taken place - but it was what he was used to.

He learnt that he did a lot of other things just after people looked very confused and even hostile. So he made an effort to fit in with them better. They’d never thank him for it, of course, but he did it for his own enjoyment. So he learnt how to walk backwards. People reacted to him less and less, so he continued picking up this *different* way of doing things. There were limits. He couldn’t reverse throw and it was quite pointless to reverse eat, but still.

Also, he learnt to stay on his own more. It was just easier that way.

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Meanwhile...

During the early nineties a few sightings of a ‘weird, backwards-running teenager’ were reported. One person claimed to struggle with the boy, “but it hurt my head”. In a few years’ time, the reports were of a backwards-acting boy. Presumably, they thought, it was a different person. Obviously – because *obviously* people don’t live backwards. To intrigued researchers who followed the subject, there seemed to be an eccentric person going backwards all the time. Some believed he lived backwards, but there wasn’t enough evidence. During the last few years of sightings, the boy – who the tabloids referred to as ‘Yob Backwards’ for the connotations of conflict – was seen in many places, by many people.

¹ For completists and French readers: ‘vin rouge’

But then, suddenly, it was all over. And nobody knew where ‘Yob Backwards’ was.

Emit and Erutan did. But they didn’t read the “crazy” bits of the news, did they?

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Suddenly, after trying so hard to fit in, the odd looks people gave Nam Backwards stopped. His aim of trying to fit in had been met and only occasionally did he get the impression people thought he was a gimp.

He also began to read. Reading was very difficult for him, because the books were all written in what appeared to him to be the wrong letters. Even if he reversed the sounds he made he only came up with a slight similarity with what was on the paper.

One day, in a library in London, it just clicked. It was like learning a new language – at some point it just hits you, and then you start maybe thinking in that language. Only, he knew it was the same language he had been using all along. Backwards. It seemed that the subtle difference – which he thought was quite unfair – was that whereas most people can make everything up as they go along, he had to plan its entirety.

He read a lot and enjoyed thinking about all of the information he was receiving about this strange world.

He really was coming to terms with the fact that he was a backwards man. He was special. He had a power.

‘Power’. That was something he’d read in a comic book. Yes – he remembered it – ‘If you have a special power, you should be a special man.’ Like Superman. Only, he wasn’t particularly super apart from in one way. He was backwards. So he called himself ‘Backwards Man’ and then refined that to the cleverer name, ‘Nam Backwards’. It was harder for him to say than ‘Nodrog Eoj’, but it had meaning to it.

Of course, Nam Backwards didn’t read any newspapers about Yob Backwards. He was before that time, by now.

By the time he was fifteen he was a fully-fledged superhero and had a nametag to prove it.

But he still didn’t know what he’d *do*.

He considered the opportunities. All of the superheroes he read about were wonderful – but everything was wonderful because everything happened in such a silly way, he thought.

He could save lives, like them.

Yes! He could save lives better than any of them, because he could see the murders and chase the criminal!

However, he rejected the idea as useless. Why should he care about his past? He wasn’t going back there. It was like a toilet seat in a club he’d never return to – why wouldn’t he leave it up? Who would it hurt? And the moral issue? Well, what’s moral about it? You can’t change the past, he thought to himself, though not really understanding what he was thinking (wasn’t that what he had been doing his whole life?).

In fact, on reflection, how *couldn’t* he change the past? If he lived on, and did things that affected the future, wouldn’t that change everyone else’s future? Nam

couldn't work it out. He wasn't even the brightest of people, on account of his life being pretty messed up.

He was certain (though he didn't have any reason to be) that he could change *his* future. Did that mean that the only person he could save was himself?

He put his new confusion to work when he went to stay in an empty house. He'd read something in a work on 'philosophy' about 'free will'. Do people choose what they do? That's what he'd picked up from it. He didn't know the answer. Nor did the book. But he knew the answer for *him* made the answer for everyone else seem small beans¹.

So, he stayed in a house. He asked himself: do I need to buy the house at some point? If not, how can it possibly work? He'd read about another fascinating word in a big book: 'paradox'.

He waited in the house. For a long string of nights he had the most terrible anxiety attacks and kept worrying about the same thing: "does my life make any sense?" He would go to bed with at least three hot water bottles, and get quite worked up about it. He even squealed and wept to himself. He was beginning to get lonely. This wasn't the life of a superhero.

He was determined to work this out though. So he wasn't going to buy the house. He was testing the system. If he didn't buy the house, how could he come to own it and live with it.

In the end, a family of Chinese people appeared in the house and both they and Nam found it a bit awkward sharing, so he moved out.

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And they moved out then, too.

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Nam still wasn't satisfied. What if...

What if, he considered, he read one of these magnificent books like, say 'Are You Dave Gorman?', which he liked, and then wrote it (he could do that) before the original author? What would happen then?

But he was still a youngster and youngsters can't really be bothered to do these kinds of things.

So, aged 17, he went looking for sex.

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Beth didn't know she was carrying his sperm before it was too late. A man (quite attractive, mind) had approached her, taken her clothes off, and started straight away. Hmmm, she thought, is this a violation of my rights?

Nevertheless, after she sensed he produced something inside her, she had a great deal of peculiar fun. She had never seen it done this way before.

Then, as he appeared to do up her clothes and kiss her more and more lightly, before exiting the room, she reached her climax, and forgave him for having apparently raped her under an hour ago.

¹ Small beans makes sense. They are there, you eat them, they fill you up. So what if you won't ever understand their fundamental nature? Nam found on his plate a pile of Metaphysical Nightmare Beans. Imagine the flatulent aftermath.

The children went sideways through time. Their stories are lost, presumed incomprehensible.



Nam knew it'd be OK. It was the Eighties and he'd heard that wacky things happened all the time.

Then, half a year later, he fell in love. Not with Beth – she had just been a pleasant one-night stand.

He knew that he was in love because she – Amanda – showed him signs of great affection all of a sudden. It was all good, so he stayed with her and knew straight from the beginning that she loved him. This was because she showed him a big sign:

‘YOU GO BACKWARDS, BUT I LOVE YOU. WE CAN OVERCOME OUR DIFFERENCES – PLEASE LOVE ME. I JUST KNOW YOU WILL. BECAUSE, WELL, ER, YOU ALREADY HAVE.’

Nam Backwards found himself revelling in the warmth of a passionate and unique love affair. Society would never accept them. Amanda swore she would never tell anyone. They would keep it perfect.

The relationship was short-lived – not because they were incompatible in personality, but incompatible in direction of temporal progression. The relationship ended with Nam showing Amanda a sign,

‘I GO BACKWARDS, BUT I LOVE YOU. WE CAN OVERCOME OUR DIFFERENCES – PLEASE LOVE ME. I JUST KNOW YOU WILL. BECAUSE, WELL, ER, YOU ALREADY HAVE.’

Why did he have to end it so quickly? Causality broke his heart.

And then Amanda was but a stranger.

Aged 20, Nam Backwards decided to go back to his Superhero dreams. He hit against the same impasse though: everyone else was going thattaway. He wasn't even famous back then. He can't have done anything much good.

He had recurring dreams where there were loads of him. Backwards men everywhere. And they were the visionaries. All of the people who had presented marvellously original ideas and works of art – they were backwards men, like him, who had changed their names and covered up their tracks.

But it was absurd! He knew why he was thinking such things: he was lonely and forlorn.

One day, he got drunk before a pub opened (or, as we'd say, closed) and then had a fight with a random lad. Nobody understood what was going on, and it just made things worse.

Gradually, he found happiness. He found it in all of the permanent things that weren't affected by time – the old books, the unruffled countryside, antiques. Perhaps this is why we should respect and look after our heritage, instead of increasingly devoting our global culture to flux. For Nam Backwards, who liked to look at a tree and know it wasn't going to be rude and run away.

Nam liked the poetry of W.B. Yeats. Yeats had been coming at the same problem from the other angle, and Nam didn't have much sympathy for him, but it was all good stuff.

So, what did he then do with his life?

For a very long time, nothing. That's to say, he just lived and had fun, which is what most people do with all of their lives anyway, so it's a little mean to call it 'nothing'.

But then he realised there was one massive question he could really tackle. All of this "what if I" nonsense – if he was going to test reality, surely he had to strike at its core.

So he hatched a plan.

He was going to take a question from moral philosophy too far. He was going to embrace the paradoxes and lost will. He was going to *do* something with his life.

He was going to kill Hitler.

Of course, he didn't. If he had done, I wouldn't be talking about Hitler now.

But at least he gave it a bash.

And he died in 1933, in a field in Germany, after admiring a large oak tree.

What happened to his body, you say?

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The body of Nam Backwards sprung up from the ground and admired a large oak tree. And then it led a very quirky life.

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