



**SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY  
SPRING CONVOCATION  
JUNE 3, 4, 5 and 6, 2008**

**Convocation Address  
By Dr. William Gibson**  
Science fiction writer

*An honorary doctor of letters was conferred on Dr. William Gibson during the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Ceremony on Thursday, June 5, 2008. The following is Dr. Gibson's convocation address.*

Thank you. It's a wonderful honor, to be here today and to receive this degree. My sincerest congratulations to all today's graduates.

When I was very young, I read that the phrase "may you live in interesting times" was actually an ancient Chinese curse. To the best of my subsequent knowledge, this is completely untrue. The phrase is now generally assumed to have been the creation of an Englishman, Ernest Bramah, an Edwardian novelist specializing in pseudo-oriental fantasies, though I've never seen definitive proof of that either.

We do live in interesting times, though, and I can only imagine that times will eventually be even more interesting for today's graduates. Ernest Bramah, if indeed it was he, supposedly presented "may you live in interesting times" as the first of three curses, of increasing severity. The next two are "may you come to the attention of those in authority", and "may you find what you are looking for". In our digital society, we are all increasingly likely, if only as a matter of course, to come to the attention of those in authority. Some view this, today, as something looming and Orwellian, but I imagine that it will increasingly work both ways, and that those in authority will come to **our** attention, most often wishing they hadn't. It is increasingly difficult for anyone, anyone at all, to keep a secret.

In the age of the leak and the blog entry, of evidence extraction and link discovery, truths will either out or be outed, later if not sooner. This is something I would bring to the attention of every statesman, political leader, and corporate head: the future, eventually, will find you out. Your secrets won't be kept. The future, wielding currently unimaginable tools of transparency, will eventually have its way with you. In the end, you will be seen to have done that which you did.

I say “truths”, however, and not “truth”, as the other side of information’s new ubiquity looks not so much transparent as crazy. Regardless of the number and power of the tools used to extract patterns from information, any sense of meaning depends on context, with interpretation coming along in support of one or another agenda. A world of informational transparency will necessarily be one of deliriously multiple viewpoints, shot through with misinformation, disinformation, conspiracy theories, and a quotidian degree of madness. We may be able to more clearly see what’s going on, but that doesn’t mean we’ll agree about it any more readily.

That, alone, will make for sufficiently interesting times, and of course we’ve got quite a lot more going on as well. These are particularly good times, it seems to me, in which to have acquired an education, and I congratulate you again on having already done that.

That said, and having long since decided that these are **not** curses, unless we choose to look at them that way, allow me to wish that each of you, in some very good, some deeply enjoyable way, finds what you’re looking for.

Thank you.