

Welcome to the Machine

Written by Alex Baer

Saturday, 06 August 2016 17:25 - Last Updated Sunday, 07 August 2016 18:32

I'm not big on predeterminism and Fate, but even less so for parlor tricks of Faith. Coincidences may not be coincidences -- it's tempting to think along these lines at times, sure. Movies and so on. I should have been born in Missouri, probably, a stubborn but accessible skeptic, happy to learn... a curmudgeonly agnostic with curiosity to burn.

So, it is with a sense of skewed (if not skewered) aplomb, that I had a run-in with a berserk ATM, then managed to also have an allied discussion run equally amok. Here's what happened...

The other day, at the (in)convenience store, I was in for a pop and some cash. The ATM's in the back in the corner, after the magazines. So, I'm feeding in my card and waiting to twitch out the appropriate finger-dance on the key pad, to let my fingers do the high-kick walking, prime the machine-pump, and get the money flowing.

The ATM spat my card back out. No message on screen -- just URP, and card's back in the slot. I check out the card. Nothing wrong with the card, so far as I could see. I try again -- and URP, here we go again.

This sequences continues for a while, sort of like the argument you have with vacuum cleaners, when they don't feel much like sucking up a perfectly visible item, and you go back over a patch a few times, then finally get fed up enough to bend over, pluck the object from its carpet perch, and "feed" it to the reluctant vac.

Finally, the card is accepted. Yaay! Oh -- wait. My *code's* not being accepted. Now what? Cancel transaction, start over. Guess what? URP -- here we go again.

After a few more rounds of *Confusuriate* the Consumer -- it's my new hybrid of *confuse* and *infuriate*

-- I seek refuge elsewhere, on the shores of another (in)convenience store, further down the way, at the corner of Disappointment Way and Transiting Circle.

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This time, worked like a charm, no problems. *Zzzzzz*, right in, then *bloop blop blu-beebeep -blooty-bloop-bleet*, and Money-in-Hand Land has been achieved, Houston.

Machines. Tempermental. Just mental, maybe. Dunno.

[closes eyes, shakes head a sec, exhales a large sigh, and moves on]

Another tepid victory for humanity.

* * *

Later, I find myself trading machine-war stories with a friend. We agree on three things: ONE: Machines are out to get us. TWO: That we are, in fact, not paranoid, if it's true. THREE: That another beer was called for.

The conversation turned to ideal machines, if we might have one -- ATMs led off, based on my recent combat experiences, and because they represent a kind of Fountain of Fantasy and Joy approach to living that only a capitalist society could induce.

We agree to keep the conversation afloat by making the parameters more difficult -- otherwise, we have our Magic Money Forever Card, and the discussion is over. So, right off, no instant-wealth-forever scenarios, no Wizard's Wands of Eternal Goods and Services, either.

It goes on like this for a while, and we get it closer to the perfect machine: How about a food ATM? We laugh some at the humorous schtick many years ago, on *Mystery Science Theater 3000*, where a slice of cheese is supposedly produced from a Polaroid (*say cheese!*) camera.

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So, we nail it: An ATM for pizzas!

Just then, the bar TV pipes up to let us know there already *IS* a pizza-dispensing ATM -- first and only one in the world. It's in Cincinnati. The cheese bubbles on our machine-dream-pizzas are pooped, popped, and without pizzaz.

So, we gab a little more about other interesting options, keeping one eye on the big TV eye, parked off to the corner, up on the wall, where it glares down at us.

We decide to abandon money, and have ATMs do something entirely different -- tell jokes, maybe. Then we settle on a social-networking sort of thing -- talking the pulse of people in the area, maybe, to help policy mak....

... and the TV tells us all about a new "mood" ATM in New Zealand. It collects input from citizens and provides a way to take an "emotional pulse" of people in the area.

Suddenly, I find myself talking about an ATM that would dispense plane tickets to New Zealand -- except the whole goods-and-services angle was axed two beers ago, as we say, when measuring tavern time in terms of talk. (It's a sort-of "how many feet are in a liter" sort of thing that only a couple beers will help you better understand.)

I mean, what are the odds for two in a row? So, we finally agree that the best we can come up with is an ATM for kids -- the three-to-seven set, say -- so they can get clear answers or info or advice or tell someone a story they made up, or whatever. (We figured kids at age 5 today know more about computers than both of *us*, put together, so, they should be able to work it, no problems.)

The bar TV went on blathering about offensive body odor in an increasing dense (tell me about it) society, and the only true way to create a personal fortune by following someone else's advice (who is, by the way, getting rich only from the brains in coming up with dispensing such

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advice), and the latest miracle diet -- number Eight Quintillion in the unending series of *If Only* books from Distant Yearnings Publishing.

That's when it hit me -- *SAGE* ATMs, like an update on the old fortune-and-weight machines! Imagine a wise, mountaintop guru wherever you now see a stubborn, card-and-money-grubbing ATM!

My first suggestion, I take from the TV commercial: Hit the "Ideal Weightloss Diet" button and get back a slip which says, "Over Time -- Eat Less, Exercise More." Radical, right?

Select the "Ideal Marriage-Helper" button, and get a print-out which says, "Stop being a jerk -- apologize, and bring [select one, unless significant error has occurred] flowers / candy / liquor / take-out / small, adorable pet. And, would it kill you to do more around the kitchen?"

Revolutionary!

To celebrate, we order a final beer, and discuss the message which might get spat out if anyone were to hit the "Another Beer?" button.

We imagined the slip: "If no-one is driving, and no one is waiting at home or fretting, there is always time for one more."

You know, machines aren't so bad, after all.

Today's Bonus:

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And now, on tap, one of the better excuses for accordion music!

(foreign) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h_eAGM65zZA

(domestic) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WzC_koWckdY

Info:

Pizza ATM: <http://time.com/4441307/americas-first-pizza-atm-has-officially-arrived/>

Mood ATM: <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-news-from-elsewhere-36974420>