

A Hard Act To Follow

Written by Bob Alexander

Tuesday, 10 January 2012 20:22

Here's a synopsis of a science fiction short story I'm thinking about leaving unfinished:

The crime of murder isn't particularly noteworthy. On average about 40 people are murdered every day in the United States. However the four murders that occurred on the day in question made headlines around the world. The victims were the former Secretaries of Defense and State, and the previous President and Vice-President of the United States.

The killings took place in California, Maryland, Wyoming, and Texas at 3:47 a.m. EST. All four died from a gunshot wound to the head. The gun was placed against the right temple, the trigger was squeezed, and a hollow-point .22 caliber bullet fired into the brain did the rest.

Everyone in the country was asking the same question: Who was behind it? What organization from what country had the wherewithal to commit such an outrage with such terrible precision ... and then not take credit for it?

The most unsettling aspect of the murders was successfully kept from the press through the combined efforts of the Secret Service, the FBI, the CIA, and the NSA. The newspapers screamed of a vast conspiracy but the intelligence agencies knew differently.

Each murder, though separated by thousands of miles, took place at exactly the same time ... and ballistic tests on the four recovered bullets irrefutably proved the bullets were fired from the same gun.

There was no conspiracy. The intelligence agencies of the United States were looking for one person who could do the impossible.

The person they were looking for was an obscure physicist who had worked for an even more obscure R&D firm. In 1999, while completing work on a quantum entanglement experiment, he discovered that although time travel is impossible ... *stopping* time was ... feasible. Over the next ten years, working on his own time, he developed a mechanism that could stop time. Up until the moment he had a functioning device, all thoughts of how he could use it were purely hypothetical. Once he had a working prototype the question became real: What Is He Going To Do With It?

He had a very short list of what he *wasn't* going to do with it ... give it to the government. The history of the last century was replete with examples of why the government couldn't be trusted with, nor should have access to, any weapon sharper than an orange. So if he wasn't going to give it to the government ... what was he going to do with it?

Why Save The World of course!

For starters he could single-handedly bring about the end of war. At that moment the physicist was as crazy as anyone else who picked up a gun and set out to solve a problem. With righteousness buzzing in his brain he began his new life's work. Getting away with murder for a just cause.

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He knew he had to get the attention of The Powers That Be. He just couldn't surreptitiously leave a note on the president's desk in the Oval Office saying "*Completely withdraw from Iraq and Afghanistan* ." He knew the

president probably received
hundreds

of like-minded missives every day. He had to do something to ensure attention would be paid to his note. And he would have to slightly rephrase it to something like, "*Completely withdraw from Iraq and Afghanistan ... or you're next.*"

He drove to Washington DC, took a White House tour, stopped time, left his note, calmly walked out into a time-frozen world, and bicycled away to his car parked on the outskirts of the city. There he resumed the flow of time, checked into a motel room, and avidly watched the news.

The Secret Service assured the president it was impossible for any would-be assassin to get to him. Select members of his cabinet reminded him the position of the United States was to *never* negotiate with terrorists. And the president agreed with them right up until the moment the physicist shot him in the head.

The physicist worked his way down through the presidential order of succession until finally ... the former Secretary of Agriculture's first act, after being sworn into the presidency, was to withdraw all American military and civilian personnel from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Though his work in Washington DC wasn't finished, the physicist decided to take a little breather. He had all the time in the world to drive up to New York and visit a few changes upon Wall Street.

There are many reasons for not writing this story.

It's derivative. Everyone from H.G. Wells to Rod Serling has taken a crack at the concept of stopping time. But that's not what's stopping me.

I believe, as does the physicist in the story, that the Dominant Culture will not voluntarily transform itself to a sane and sustainable way of living. It will not voluntarily stop destroying the natural world, eliminating indigenous cultures, exploiting the poor, and killing those who resist. I also don't believe that a political solution is possible within a completely corrupt political system. At the same time I'm leery of any solution that suspends, even temporarily, the Democratic process. But then I could also argue that a completely corrupt political system has already destroyed the Democratic process.

But do y'know what I really believe in?

I believe in The Smith Act of 1940.

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It says in part:

“Whoever knowingly or willfully advocates, abets, advises, or teaches the duty, necessity, desirability, or propriety of overthrowing or destroying the government of the United States or the government of any State, Territory, District or Possession thereof, or the government of any political subdivision therein, by force or violence, or by the assassination of any officer of any such government; or

Whoever, with intent to cause the overthrow or destruction of any such government, prints, publishes, edits, issues, circulates, sells, distributes, or publicly displays any written or printed matter advocating, advising, or teaching the duty, necessity, desirability, or propriety of overthrowing or destroying any government in the United States by force or violence, or attempts to do so; ...

Shall be fined under this title or imprisoned not more than twenty years, or both ...”

I also believe in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012 that affirms the President's authority to detain, via the Armed Forces, any person without trial ... indefinitely.

How bizarre. Ten years ago I wouldn't have had any qualms about tossing off a twist on a Rod Serling story. When I read about the latest offense committed by the Bush/Cheney Regime I felt outrage. When Obama signed the NDAA on New Year's Eve, along with outrage ... I felt the first stirrings of fear.

“They're really doing it.” I thought, *“They're really bringing it all down right on top of us.”*

And now for the first time in my life I've contemplated self-censorship. It was John Cleese as Basil Fawlty who said, *“Well let me tell you something ... this is exactly how Nazi Germany started!”* But this is no joke. This *is* exactly how Nazi Germany started. People in all walks of life censored themselves out of fear. In a closed society you wonder about whether you can say something, write something, ***even think something.***

The psychopaths in power have passed laws that make it against the law ... to talk about getting rid of the psychopaths in power. Neat trick.

If I never get around to finishing the story ... here's a spoiler alert ... it doesn't end well for him.