

## Death: No Longer a Passing Fancy

Written by Alex Baer

Monday, 10 March 2014 11:21

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The cost of paying attention keeps going up: Increasing cases of thyroid growths near Fukushima. Tar sands. Poisoned water supplies. Drones. North Korea. Corporate welfare. Tainted and questionable food supplies. Chemical weapons. Gun violence. Man-made gases eating the ozone shield.

There's even a recent report of a dormant virus coming back to life after a nap of 30,000 years. After a run through the headlines, I'm feeling very much like I could use a nap of a few thousand years myself.

As hazardous to one's sense of calm as is trying to stay abreast of current events, it's even more dangerous to one's head wiring to start connecting the dots between disparate events. That's where you go from losing peace of mind to shredding, and shedding, pieces of mind.

Show you what I mean: What do you do with the realization that your country and culture is a death cult? Taken individually, there are a number of troubling points of concern. They go deep. Added up, and you start to feel like an accidental conspiracy theorist, thunderstruck on a sunny day, zapped by a bolt from blue sky, holding the lightning rod high when the Big Paranoias have come out to play.

Deconstruction can be a constructive activity. Start with the big, obvious night terrors, like wars of convenience. I have yet to hear even a distantly plausible, honorable reason why we broke a nation and just about bankrupted ourselves in the process. There is no comforting nursery rhyme I know of that makes the leap from *This Cradle of Civilization* to *That Cradle Will Fall*.

Iraq is one thing. Afghanistan is a stretch, but at least its opening cover story is more plausible. Or politically palatable. Or partially defensible. Not exactly a feel-good war, like the good old days -- *I'm being ironic here, headshrinkers* -- but not a complete embarrassment, either. At any rate, they tell me that this bookend pair of psychotic nightmares will cost us \$4 to \$6 trillion dollars when all the receipts are in. That's one hell of a credit card bill. No wonder the infrastructure's on a cold-canned-beans diet.

Tally up our history. We've hardly had any year where we've not been embroiled in a war or

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skirmish or police action or military mop-up campaign -- overt or covert -- of one sort or another. We've had only five years in our history when we haven't been off warring somewhere or other. That chunk of peace broke out during the Great Depression. Imagine that: *For a while there, we were too broke to kill.*

- Like you, I would prefer to forget that we have more gun deaths in the U.S. than anywhere in the world. And that's percentage by population, not just sheer numbers. And, like you, I'd prefer to ignore that 200 more kids have been killed by handguns since Newton. Just like you, I'm ready to deflect the fact that there were seven times as many firearm deaths in the U.S., in one year, than the total number of military deaths in Iraq, in nine years.

Incredible outcomes from all-too-credible sources. It goes on and on, as the deconstruction moves to the somewhat less obvious, like sports, entertainment, even our sense of humor. Before the exercise is over, you may, like me, be giving some thought to a new national flag -- maybe black with a gleaming white, symbolic skull about to rise, or maybe set, into a watery horizon line.

Take sports. We slammed the door on a pastoral national pastime, baseball, and took warfare to the gridiron, pitting tank against tank, steroidal behemoth against behemoth. We even made sure to get plenty of microphones down to the field in order to catch every bone-jarring collision on our viewing screens, and match every field trauma and concussion with a concussive blast from our speakers.

I think our subwoofers are barking up the wrong tree, and our tweeters are being out-tweeted by our urgent, in-game messages and smiley faces to one another when one mountain of meat falls on another, when one slab of jerseyed humanity slams against another.

Stay with me: Entertainment. How many deaths do you consume every day in books, movies, plays, and teevee shows? I think we've stopped seeing these *as* deaths. They have become crime scenes to be investigated with the latest analytical tools, wielded by the most-recently-dazzling investigator. They're steps in the dance of plot, just cogs in the wheel of storytelling. Our daily dates with death have simply become dramatic opportunities, the scaffolding we use to hang our stories upon, and hang our cast members from, too.

Even though we're reluctant to talk about death in this country, avoiding it like the plague, I think we should start noticing the amounts of death we consume. I think we should spend one percent of the Pentagon's budget for -- I dunno, toilet paper, say -- research into new plot devices and storyline architecture that will seem equally riveting and every bit as high-stakes as

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Death is now.

We should be able to take that one percent of \$130 million of TP funds and get something even more useful for it, or else we should just ship more pallets of dollar bills to the Pentagon directly, for their use in rest rooms, and bypass the inefficiencies and expense of middle men and the lumbering supply chain involving tissue rolls.

Meanwhile, maybe we can get the FDA and the Centers for Disease Control to issue maximum limits for our daily intake of murder and mayhem. We could use a little balance here, as the NRA's sky's-the-limit policy offers no breathable atmosphere -- just a slingshot into the stratosphere. Talk about sucking all the air out of the room: *Way to go, Wayne.*

Still got your hand on the "go" button of your air-hammer, and ready for some more deconstruction? Take a crack at the national sense of humor, now. No, really.

I just got done reading a piece that geographically sources humor. Europeans, it seems, go for the absurd and surreal in their diet of belly laughs. As for Americans? You guessed it. *We love us some insults and threats.*

Myself, I used to refer to some of this as Power Humor, the kind of yucks that a pin-headed boss vomits onto his underlings -- threats thinly disguised as humor. The sort that makes your eyebrows knit and knot together while being expected to chuckle along at the good-natured gutting of staff by the titular head.

Still not convinced we're living in a slash-and-burn society? Well, all I can suggest is you spend a little time on any web page -- any page at all -- that offers visitors an opportunity to post comments, and take a look at all the train wrecks scattered around the electronic landscape.

One need not go to inflammatory sites where one expects to find conflict aplenty. You can find more manic meltdowns per square inch than ever before. This is true on the most innocuous sites. There is no anti-troll inoculation that I know of. You can find yourself in the midst of a skull-ripping showdown and war of words on websites ranging from cooking and cruises to

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cartoons, and from Kellogg's or K-Mart to Khartoum and back again.

You can even find people who will cash in on tragedy, hearing cash registers singing, when Death spreads its wings -- like the insensitive morons trying to turn the missing Malaysian flight number, and its possible sky-fall, into an economic windfall.

Connect the dots yourself. As much as I am certain we are Death Cult World Headquarters, here in America, there are little islands of sanity and smiles that dot our ocean of dotted-line madness.

You know that article I bumped into about humor preferences by continent? A lot of very nice people posted actual humor there. There's hardly any machete whacks by trolls.

And, no matter how time-crushed and event-rushed we feel in today's world, all is not yet lost: There's even a movement for six-second-long bursts of humor. It's apparently for the people, so says a story participant, who just don't have time for a five-minute YouTube video.

Maybe, in our country's redesign of the Death Cult flag, we can make it a laughing skull. Then, we can laugh ourselves to death, Jolly Roger style.

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Thyroid:

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/09/fukushima-children-debate-thyroid-cancer-japan-disaster-nuclear-radiation>

Welfare: <http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2014/2/corporate-welfaresubsidiesboeingalcoa.html>

Gases: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/03/09/ozone-layer\\_n\\_4930799.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/03/09/ozone-layer_n_4930799.html)

Virus: <http://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-26387276>

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War cost: [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/study-iraq-afghan-war-costs-to-top-4-trillion/2013/03/28/b82a5dce-97ed-11e2-814b-063623d80a60\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/study-iraq-afghan-war-costs-to-top-4-trillion/2013/03/28/b82a5dce-97ed-11e2-814b-063623d80a60_story.html)

Pentagonal toilet paper:

<http://digitaljournal.com/biz/business/op-ed-us-defense-department-and-spending-on-toilet-tissue/article/364843>

Humor: <http://www.npr.org/blogs/13.7/2014/03/07/287250640/what-is-the-funniest-joke-in-the-world>

Website: <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-26515165>

Six Seconds: <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-26343770>

Shorthand: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_expressions\\_related\\_to\\_death](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_expressions_related_to_death)

Guns:

<http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/health/2013/09/19/u-s-has-more-guns-and-gun-deaths-than-any-other-country-study-finds/>

Guns, again: <http://www.msnbc.com/the-last-word/us-0>

Guns, one more time:

<http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2013/12/children-killed-guns-newtown-anniversary>

War count: <http://www.loonwatch.com/2011/12/we-re-at-war-and-we-have-been-since-1776/>

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and: <http://americanhistory.about.com/library/timelines/bltimelineuswars.htm>

and: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline\\_of\\_United\\_States\\_military\\_operations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_United_States_military_operations)

### Today's Bonuses:

<http://www.funeralhelper.org/funeral-quotes/humorous-death-quotes.html>

and: <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/gallows-humor>

and: <http://www.greatcleanjokes.com/jokes/death-humor/>

And, a starting point for an Addams Family gallery: [http://www.google.com/images?q=addams+family+cartoon+new+yorker&client=safari&rls=en&oe=UTF-8&hl=en&sa=X&oi=image\\_result\\_group&ei=gvEdU5emNc6DogTOpILwDg&ved=0CBsQsAQ](http://www.google.com/images?q=addams+family+cartoon+new+yorker&client=safari&rls=en&oe=UTF-8&hl=en&sa=X&oi=image_result_group&ei=gvEdU5emNc6DogTOpILwDg&ved=0CBsQsAQ)