

Swimming Against the Yo-Yo Tide

Written by Alex Baer

Thursday, 27 March 2014 21:37

Everyone's heard the one where Life, after closing one door, opens a window. After doing two of the most dangerous things in America that one can do -- reading and thinking -- I have to take exception to that one.

This is especially true as it often seems Life is intent on demonstrating that other insightful discovery: that, when you die, your soul goes up on the roof of the garage, and is stuck there, with the Frisbees. As soon as I have read something and thought about it some, this is often what happens to my own consciousness.

Maybe that metaphor needs a tune-up. Perhaps the residual feeling of Life's hide-and-seek games, when humans want to seriously pursue a round of Q & A with The Universe, are closer to one door slamming shut, in a berserk gust of wind, then the triggering of multiple trapdoors, windows guillotining down into the frame, and shutters twitching their large flaps like the ears of over-caffeinated elephants on meth.

After this opening salvo, the house soon collapses in on itself and catches fire, while the chunk of ground it's on breaks away in an earthquake, is then lifted up by a tornado, Oz-style, and thrown down over a cascading series of waterfalls and lava pits. That's some game.

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(Fans of Gary Larson's *Far Side* work may recognize something of the *Crisis Clinic* here.

Except for the

Boneless Chicken Ranch

, which may be a yet-unproved stretch of imaginative license, I believe all of Gary's work to be based on actual reality. This opinion is based on my own life experiences, just without many of the wild animals that routinely escaped from Larson's pen.

In fact, I'm thinking of founding a religion, out in the garage, based on his works and viewpoint. Unless anything better comes to mind, it'll probably be called *Farsidianism*. Or, maybe, just *Garism*

. Or

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Gary

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Why out in the garage? Well, heck, it's right under where all the believers' souls will be. Plus, you always have to have a beginning, in any religion. And, well, a start like, "In the beginning, we were all up on the roof, stuck..." seems pretty fitting, and like it might work out OK.)

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I mean, we humans go from one land mine of logic to another, falling down one intellectual mine shaft after another, in our endless search for knowledge. Rarely is Lassie already there, ready to go get help. Getting our itchy curiosity scratched, and our questions answered, is dangerous work, and confusing as all get out.

This has been true from the first flickering moment of wonder, that included questions like, "What's a *sabertooth*, and why are you pointing and screaming at me like that?" all the way to today, where you can hear things like, "The Koch brothers seem pretty nice, don't you think?"

Usually, the level of danger stays pretty much the same all throughout human history and since our quest for knowledge -- especially since the invention of greed, wealth, and cheap retreads bought between paydays at *Jake's Tire Ranch and Valu Barn*.

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(Sidebar: It has emerged as an evident truism that one should use caution when doing business with places that like to use novel spellings for their operations, or put dancing letters on their signs.

For some reason, business owners think that quality products are best conveyed when described as *Kwal-A-Tee* and *Koala-Tea* and so on. This is the same logic that is supposed to

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let you know that you are safe doing business with dancing-letter companies, because dancing letters indicate fun, wacky, zany places to shop, and not indicative of viper pits of sales quotas and commissions, damp salesmanship, and clunky marketing ploys.)

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Humanity's Need To Know has always included the ongoing risk that we'll suddenly wake up on the roof without any warning, our clothes still smoldering from the final explosion of our chemistry sets. Some parts of this human search for knowledge have evolved into the scientific method -- like, where we try to figure out why Zogg isn't moving, after the volcano spat a boulder onto him, and so on.

Other elements of the search are best left up to *Farsidians* in our midst -- such level-headed people are best armed for the true mysteries in life, as they have the ability to live in many worlds simultaneously, like Druids and weather people, who know where to point on the blank studio wall, and yet, still have their fingers trace over the national map, and show where the *moist, tropical low will be pulling up moisture, and into Stonehenge, by later this evening.*

It is probably just as well that they remain mystical and keep any notions of tropical depressions to themselves, as it just doesn't seem possible to your standard lay person, how anyone could be depressed in the tropics. Except for maybe the ottoman-sized bugs. And the snakes. (Like The Book of Indy notes, always be ready to ask, "Snakes -- why'd it have to be snakes?")

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We humans yo-yo back and forth, zig-zagging on every tide, swimming against the currents, trying to harness our impulses and insights, working tirelessly, cobbling one find into another, finally building a long chain of incredibly erroneous conclusions. Sometimes, however, we luck out, and the *Farsidian* truth becomes suddenly evident.

Such is the case in recent months. We've had some unprecedented *osbornes* lately. (An osborne is a

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unit of measurement indicating great, unpredictable, and improbable leaps and advances in human knowledge. It is taken from the Larson cartoon in which a child raises a hand in a classroom and asks, "Mr. Osborne, may I be excused? My brain is full.")

We've had the astonishment of a new dwarf planet in our solar-systemic midst. The discovery of rings being possible around asteroids. The presence of almost 9 billion Earth-like planets. There was a cosmic trifecta, too: Observations of gravitational waves from an inflation of the universe triggered by, and further cinching as correct, the Big Bang. Consider this the missing link between the theory of relativity and quantum mechanics. It is mind-boggling in its implications, and the stuff of Nobel prizes, once fully proved.

That's one heck of a haul for the last handful of months. Chip in, too, evidence of early human history, in the DNA found in a fossil 400,000 years old -- 300,000 years older than the previous-best find -- and the new need to rethink that early history. Add to it more information on the subject of humanity's likely super-accelerated evolution, and the possible role of conflict in that speedy evolution. A *wow* step in synthetic biology, too, with the production of a synthetic chromosome, and...

Well, it's been a mother lode of scientific stunners, one after another -- a glut of mouth-gapers, an embarrassment of riches, an array of *amazements*. (*Pssst!* *Anyone know the collective noun for an avalanche of developments that would cause science deniers and evolutionary revisionists to shudder at a thousand times their normal rates of vibration?* *A shudder of discovery?* *A Copernicus of news?* *A scandal of truth?*)

And, if that's not quite enough to make your jaw go slack, here's something to make both scientists *and* religionists restless, or party-hounds, or downright cuckoo: A Belgian Catholic priest and cosmologist originally proposed the specifics of our universe's origins -- he published proposals that would later come to be known as the Big Bang.

We are used to scenes where holy rollers try to roll back scientific inquiry, Galileo style. We

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hardly expect science-rocking explanations from the religious. This alone should tell you how much it is that we really know about ourselves. Or others. Or life, the universe, or anything.

If there is a lesson in any of this, it may well be this one: When it comes to science and spirituality, one field need not exclude another. Carl Sagan, for example, had many thoughts along this line. As did others. Albert Einstein, too.

If I had a spare wish, it might be to firmly pass along that one thought to those who expend so much energy denying the connections and insights that help humanity move forward. Another wish might be that we never lose the awe, the curiosity, the taste for wonder. Sagan once said, "If we ever reach the point where we think we thoroughly understand who we are and where we came from, we will have failed."

Somewhere, in all the window-closing and door-slamming, and in all the dropping-open of trapdoors and the clattering of shutters, it would be good to remember how little we know, and how one discovery can turn our lives around -- even the whole species, too.

And now, I hope you'll excuse me. I'm *osborne-ing*. I am up on the roof. My brain is full.

Frisbeetarians:

http://www.barrypopik.com/index.php/new_york_city/entry/old_frisbee_players_never_die_they_just_end_up_on_the_roof

Crisis Clinic - original: <http://www.etsy.com/listing/151293252/vintage-far-side-gary-larson-crisis>
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Crisis Clinic - tribute: <http://www.worth1000.com/entries/554953/crisis-clinic>

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Snakes: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Clwlj3x24Q4>

New planet:

<http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2014/03/26/294358647/new-dwarf-planet-found-at-the-solar-systems-outer-limits>

Asteroid: <http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2014/03/26/294872989/for-the-first-time-astronomers-find-asteroids-can-have-rings>

Trifecta/priest: <http://www.utsandiego.com/news/2014/mar/17/bigbang-universe-UCSD/>

Earth-like planets: <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/8-8-billion-earth-like-planets-milky-study-article-1.1507171>

DNA:

http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/05/science/at-400000-years-oldest-human-dna-yet-found-raises-new-mysteries.html?_r=0

Evolution: <http://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-19598980>

Synthetic biology: <http://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-26768445>

Sagan on spirituality:

<http://www.brainpickings.org/index.php/2013/12/20/carl-sagan-varieties-of-scientific-experience/>

and: <http://www.brainpickings.org/index.php/2013/06/12/carl-sagan-on-science-and-spirituality/>

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Today's Bonus:

If you're going to swim against the yo-yo tide, what better guides than Yo-Yo-Ma, and Bach, in the math and music of the universe? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KHzfD6XLK7Q>

Larson's ...*may I be excused?* and so forth:
<http://www.theslowbleed.com/culture/'smarter'-people-take-naps/>

More Larson cartoons as photos: <http://www.worth1000.com/contests/23833/unauthorized-far-side-tribute-ps-adv-9>

Calling 42: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Life,_the_Universe_and_Everything

and: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/42_\(number\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/42_(number))

Perspective: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8P1Y1a7-L4>

and: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_IVqMXPFYwI