

Sun Storms & Drive-Ins

Written by Alex Baer

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It's morning on this side of the planet and solar storms are raging to high heaven, largest in five years, triggered by massive solar flares earlier this week. Earth is to be blasted with charged particles heading in at four million miles an hour, our thin atmospheric onionskin playing catch with all these incredibly quick-moving hot potatoes.

The universe is capable of staggering speeds and inconceivably mammoth distances. On Earth, right here, the coffee pot is all the way across the kitchen, an infinity wrapped in a finite fold of space. Even once filled and tripped, the coffee will take two-thirds an eternity to drip and to drip, slowly evolving its primordial bouillon in there, finally creating the life-giving brew as we know it -- warm, old-style CPR breath compresses, delivered unto our lips, taken in sips.

Apparently, with the sun showing off, jeopardizing GPS info, satellite traffic, maybe a few commercial plane routes, it's a great time to see the northern lights at higher latitudes, a really great show if you can catch it, running now through Friday -- similar, maybe, to getting a good angle on an outdoor drive-in movie screen for a few moments, while rocketing past.

If you have no experience with such things, these were building- and barn-sized movie screens set outdoors on which were beamed flickering images of one kind or another, enjoyed by carloads of people who would drive in to the establishment in their vehicles, parking them on ramped-up humps and mounds, watching the show through their windshields, or outdoor in lawn chairs, trying to discern dialogue from boat-anchor speakers in indestructible metal boxes, attached by wires to posts, then hung onto windows by drivers, or half drug into and inside the vehicles.

The acoustics were no picnic, converting any perceptible sound -- from woman's scream to the destruction of cities, from an accordion solo to a baby's cry -- to the same sort of suffocated sound-*swallowings* currently available in modern airports, train stations, arenas, and so on, any place public and huge, where clear and accurate information is helpful and sometimes vital.

Perhaps you have had this experience, too, of slowing your walking pace during an echoing, indoor, overhead announcement, only to stop and look around you once the message has been completed, discovering many people with their gazes suspended in mid-air, heads craned back, mouths open -- as if trying to employ all the possible senses, including taste and scent, in an attempt to understand the nature of all the sonic squawking, decode what the garbled gabbling

was about.

It has been suggested that people trying to break into the translating profession cut their linguistic teeth in such roles -- providing they first score quite high in intermediate mumbling, muffled microphone technique, non-standard diction, inverted syntax, other-worldly syllabic syncopation, and, if candidates demonstrated high abilities in maintaining hopelessly lost speech flow in relation to information and text to be presented, along with idiomatic breakdowns and basic blowouts in generic verbal tangles and sniffing, roundabout rambles.

The dilmornik snazzlafax will be poodla-gopler until later on dewp vurkner alko jivikarazac! You probably know the drill.

But, drive-in movies were great teenage date-destination excuses, hormonal playgrounds, and first-class opportunities to feed swarms of area mosquitoes, and to be bitten in unusual places, while missing most of the second-run, third-rate movies -- then, hours later, in the small numbers on the clock, trying to re-focus, go forth and project home. It was in this zone of mental twilight that some who had perhaps sipped from fifths would drive off with a metal speaker, if wire and post yielded, if the vehicles had exceptionally strong side-window glass. Likely as not, some took the dreadful things home, trying to get these mysteries to work right, finding out they did the same dang thing at home: *Snoofla zac bissert flox voo kindarrka helbbo!*

The BBC adds to their story saying that large solar flares and magnetic storms cut off long distance telephone service in Illinois, back in 1972. Things were simpler then, when one just had to hunker down, be patient with Mother Nature, and just ride things out, wait and see if things cleared up. Like, when one was snowbound -- or, when the drive-in's battered old pickup truck would go back and forth in the aisles, a two-stroke engine in the bed of the truck, misfiring heatedly, threatening to stroke out itself, would be spewing an oily, smudge-pot, smoke-screen affair, hoping to turn the tide of the waves of invading mosquitoes via gas attack, attempting to suffocate assorted and sordid assortments of biting and sucking bugs, annihilating patrons in the heated summertime confines of their car-bound desires, people itching and scratching themselves and each other, and for a wide range of reasons.

Yes, it was almost enough to make us wish we were back home, safe in bed, hoping, as they said, the bedbugs would not bite. Good thing coffee's ready, or bed would be pretty tempting right now, rather than face incoming particles at four million miles an hour. Normally, you can't

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get up that kind of speed around here, not this time of day, traffic is terrible -- but, we're running late, we'll take some chances. See you later on, at the northern lights. Bring citronella, maybe some spray.