

We Could End Up Miles from Here

Written by Alex Baer

Tuesday, 10 June 2014 17:31 - Last Updated Wednesday, 11 June 2014 19:06

The days unfold strangely for anyone puttering around gamely, if lamely, in life. As an amateur human being a long way from pro status, it's possible to stroll among the headlines and footnotes, around the millstones and milestones, taking informal readings on this and that.

Even on a good day, with a stiff, sane breeze blowing across the news websites of the land, it's impossible to gauge the gradations of cultural degradation, to get accurate readings of any kind. It's a gut-feeling sort of enterprise. There are no calibrated anything-*ometers* to slap into play. There are no national and regional numbers pouring in to Tracking Central. There are no land mine or shock wave or blast zone maps.

There are no compression gradients to be drawn. No depressive ingredients to be withdrawn. Everything unfolds like a mushroom cloud, new ones going off all day long. Sometimes, they are far away and in slow motion. Other times, the flash is sight-searing, and the blast is a sight meant for no eyes.

It's all in the mind, of course. My doppelgangers tell me this is so. One of them looks and sounds like the phys-ed teacher and coach I had from junior high, telling me to shake it off, even though I'd been knocked out cold. The other one is a dead ringer for my boot camp sergeant, telling me to shake it off, and to knock out another 50 push-ups. Talk about *cold*.

My mind's eye sometimes has a seriously grim, booby-trapped, *trip-wire* sense of humor -- you never know when something's going to set it off. My Muse attempts to balance things off, sabotaging my serious side with the rope burns of gallows humor and sudden *click-blam!* of land-mine sensibilities.

They conspire to drive my psyche in a zig-zag pattern across the landscape of our culture, constantly seeking out secret bunkers of irony and silent slit-trenches of silliness. When the mushrooms clouds are blooming perceptively close at hand, it is good to have a conceptual place to park one's linguistic feet, if not the mouth or mind.

- Even now, I want to stand up and yell, "*Serpentiiiiine!*" Or, at the very least, from the Monty Python gang, "*Run away!*"

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Run away!"

M

eanwhile. life proceeds. It does not consult me.

"Boom!" say the idiot-speak shells as they land, these new, incoming rounds from the GOP-laden House of Representatives. *"Whoosh!"* say the marketing-speak advertising rockets striking all around, every day, without rest, psychotically peppering the countryside, pounding away, whether chock-full of people or utterly barren.

"Ka-Blammo!" shriek the fresh volleys from the corporate spokes-droids. *"Fla-wham!"* shout the moronic bursts from the talking Fox hairdos. *"Ka-frak!"* screech the piercing, migraine howls of frontmen, lobbyists, politicians, pundits, and assorted, sordid hangers-on and flippers-off.

America is a very noisy place. The noise is meant to keep you at a fever pitch, ready to reach for your wallet, and a white flag of surrender, at a moment's notice. It's meant to be loud -- so loud you can't hear yourself think.

Thinking and careful consideration is not encouraged in America, only instantaneous action -- so long as it's a sincere knee-jerk, like in a direct hit from an axe-handle to the kneecap, just so long as it's just *this side* of pants-on-fire panic, just so long as it's not at all well thought out. All is well, so long as no cognitive brain cells were used in the formation of any action.

See: We can all get behind and really trust the primitive, reptilian centers of the brain -- areas that Republicans have been specializing in for decades now: the centers for honest, wholesome agendas like fear, anxiety, impulsiveness, and aggression. After all, that pesky newcomer, the prefrontal cortex, is just not to be trusted, with its high-falutin' and devious agendas of restraint, moral differentiation, and carefully-considered decision-making.

It's just like an outsider, like the prefrontal cortex, to get all up in your face and insist on reason and logic. Figures. That busybody is the chunk of brain most recently -- dare I say it? -- *evolved*.

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There's a punch line to an old, semi-risque joke -- or what used to be risque, before F-bombs littered the landscape, common as rain drops plastering hapless pedestrians in a monsoon. It was this: *Keep your hat on -- we could end up miles from here.*

I take its inadvertent advice at least daily, sometimes multiple times a day. Or hour. Depends on the day. Or the hour. The need arises because I try to keep up with many sensible matters, and all manners of nonsense, and in various stages of production and incubation -- sometimes, I get things right off the assembly line, years before a vaccine is introduced. I inoculate myself with humor as best I can. Sometimes it's like a jolt of epinephrine to the heart, or a self-stab of atropine in the thigh.

Sometimes laughter has no effect at all. Maybe the passage of Time has made me immune to some of humor's preventive effects. For example, there is nothing I have found to counteract the blistering acidity and harmful effects of Republicans, or gun nuts, or religious zealots, or Ayn Rand devotees.

And may Fortune itself help you if you encounter all at once, and grant you strait jackets for the Republicans, stout silencers for the gun nuts, and deprogramming checklists for the zealots. To counter and awaken the zombie Ayn Squad, you're going to need a lot of time and patience to convey to devotees the rich, overfull lists of her bushels of lunatic hypocrisies, contradictions, and traumas she pioneered. Otherwise, may patience, indefatigability, tough love, and tranquilizer dart pistols find their way to you. Or else, booze.

The best I have found you can sometimes do here, anyway, on this planet, in this era, regardless of best efforts, is to go ahead and administer 100cc of as excellent an alcohol as you can afford, and apply it directly on an empty stomach, for maximum value and effect. It will not cure anything, but, in moderation, it can provide a little fuzzy-gilled anesthesia for the butter-fingered, open-skull surgery that Reality is so fond of performing at the drop of a hat, left and right, as it gallops past. Reality is a bored, perverse haunted-house denizen eyeing wayward trick-or-treaters with mischievous intent and an evil glint.

Thank Zeus that a lot of humor is timeless, though, and keeps on working, no matter how often I

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go back to its well to slurp, and no matter how old the calendars insist I really am. It is these life-giving waters that allow me to shlep and splash along through current events. Like a dazed salmon stunned by too many hard-rock landings on the journey upstream, I am never sure where I will end up.

I am not sure where a salmon would keep a hat, if it had one, but I would also urge such a salmon to hang onto its hat, as it could *also* end up miles from where it started. Unplanned miles. Rocky, dusty miles.

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So, hang onto your hat for a sec: I think it is interesting that Nelson Mandela's name is so close to the way my personal head-space always want to spell the circular form with concentric, geometric designs symbolizing the wholeness and totality of the universe in many cultures, the *mandala*

.

Anyone imprisoned for 27 years, and ending up with tuberculosis from a dank cell, all for trying to abolish inequality, has to have a deep and abiding sense of the universe. And of terrific forgiveness.

But, then, even after mulling over forgiveness, and coming to whatever conclusion you're able to scare up in that thoughtful muddle, you still have to stop and wonder about the universe and its pretty pathetic, sophomoric sense of humor. Anyone who has been around longer than a score of years already has plenty of experience wondering about this particular universe, without any help from me.

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- I'm not much for *intelligent design*, so called. Except for mandalas, perhaps, which have always appeared to me to be very smartly done, very *intelligent* designs.

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Avoiding anger as much as I can is a huge deal for me these days. I'm just tired of it, the way you get tired of seasickness, or the mumps, or dysentery, or mad cow disease, or a heart attack, or E. coli, or Ebola, or Teabaggery or Republicanism.

Nowadays, I try to laugh, no matter how much berserk madness falls at my feet, insisting on tangling itself around my ankles, threatening to pull me down during my brisk strides, and occasional speed-walking, through the headlines of my sundry places and sad planet.

- Ketchup's a vegetable? *Sure, nutritionists agree!* French Toast and French Fries enduring a bout of fumbling, foamy, patriotic froth, and *We're Number One air-stabbing* as Freedom Fries and Freedom Toast? *Absolutely, and wave a teeny-weeny little flag for me, to make things all better, you betcha!*

See, I finally figured out -- *again, for the 19 trillionth time, as a glacially slow learner* -- that I can't do anything about any of this sludge. All I can control is how I feel about it, what I choose to do with it.

It's not my first choice, and I'm still not much good at it, even after all this time. But, then again, I keep trying to master it. As I've had to admit to myself, and my bartender, I am not likely to have an opportunity in this life to prove just how incredible and wonderful a benign dictator I'd really be.

I've taken some hard falls with this learning business. Taking the training wheels off the bike wasn't too bad, but taking the net out of the tent while I was still working on the high-wire stuff was pretty brutal. I have no idea if I'm going to be in any shape to master the parachute-free skydiving segments anytime soon.

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The darndest things will infect my laughter sometimes, and then, I'll have to hold onto my hat again, not always wanting to wind up miles from here. During such moments, I'm prone to blathering on at other sites. I am an equal-opportunity *bloviator*, not restricting my bottomless bloviations to just *this site*.

- Here, I am reminded of the late David Brinkley's book title, *"Everyone is Entitled to My Opinion."* I imagine he got paid by the word. Good for him. No wonder he did a whole book.

An opportunity for one of my off-site bloviations vaulted into view over at the NPR site. I was snagged by a humorous food column, called The Salt. New food items are assaulted, and peppered, by withering humor-fire over there. Up for humorous potshots by the writers this time: Taco Bell's new *quesarito* -- a burrito wrapped in a cheese-filled quesadilla.

As good as the initial article was, the comments were even better: *humor wrapped in the bittersweet lard of irony and deep-fried in sarcasm, with a piquant tomfoolery sauce.*

Unbeatable reading entertainment.

Everything

Taco Bell was mercilessly grilled, from the rubber cheese-like sauce to the health consequences and, yes, to the unabashed tastiness, too.

- (Although, to this day, I still don't know why they bother to individually wrap processed cheese slices. Right on the side of the package, it says CHEESE FOOD, so, wouldn't it be a lot easier to feed these to the REAL cheese in big blocks, rather than a slice at a time?)

Well, what to say, except no one ever went broke underestimating American taste or our willingness to let the lowest common denominator fly the airplane. If we could handle it, we'd probably let fast food companies clamp electrodes on our tongues -- if they'd promise us to very deeply excite our tastebud-and mouth-feel centers, and very cheaply deliver a huge stimulus load of salts, sugars, and fats in our imagination centers.

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And, if you've noticed all fast food starting to look alike? That's because there are only eleven semi-food-like items present in any fast food kitchen at any time, and the ingredients just get endlessly recombined into new menu items.

- Coming soon, for breakfast: *The Yellow and Red Thing meal*. For lunch: *The Brown and Orange Thing*.

For Dinner:

The Brown and Orange Thing, Now With Flecks of Green Stuff in It.

- And, for snacks, just change the shape, from Round Thing to *Square* or *Triangular Thing*!

As someone posted: *You can taste the business school in every bite*. Yes, and all of that makes me flash back to a thought I've had for years: that I should open up a chain of stark, cheap, uber-generic, black-and-white-decor-and-signage, drive-thru restaurants, called Bag-O-Food.

- At Bag-O-Food, there are only two options: Hot Bag or Cold Bag... then, either Hot Bev or Cold Bev. What's on the menu? Well, that's dealer's choice, at each location -- completely left up to the chef crew, to whatever they can scrounge up or get on the cheap. Plus, Molybdenum- and Uranium-Club members get lucky, plastic key fobs with a four-leaf clover on one side, and the number for the Poison Hotline on the other.

After all, there's still plenty of *hotnew* ways to scalp the public and maximize the heck out of mechanized profitability here -- and to heck with the namby-pambys who say that a packet of ketchup, or a swipe of hot sauce, is not a full serving of fruit and vegetables!

Power to the free enterprise system! □ Let the invisible hand of the Free Market do its work!

Don't tread on Me! □ Let freedom ring!

- Sure: You can feel the profit dribbling down your arm as you dig in, because there's an MBA in every bite. You want a happy meal? Get the Valium chimichanga. The Ativan cobbler. The Xanax burger, at Klonopin King. This here's *bidniz, and cheapness rules*.

... just ask the Waltons.

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And, throwing caution, and my hat, to the wind, I found yet another odd development, courtesy of friends: The hormone oxytocin -- not to be confused with Rush The Addict's favorite hearing-decimating prescription drug, Oxycontin -- has been associated with increased trust, cooperation, and generosity in humans.

- Wonderful and terrifying, both. In the wrong hands, weaponized oxytocin could remove all objection to the Truly Objectionable in this world. Even worse, perhaps the oxytocin attacks already started, and some time ago, which is why we have grown adults giving total, worshipful credence to the Limbaugh-Fox-Rand-Teabagger ensemble.

It's like some horribly awry coming-out party, back when such things had to do with cotillions, gazebos, mint juleps, and crazy bouts of Mandingo Fever and bodice-rippers.

- Personally, I think Republicans have been glugging oxytocin into the American water supply since Reagan, which is why so many people still consider him a harmless old poop and remain completely ignorant of his two halves: his dark side, and his even-darker side.

If not in the water, then it's the dryer sheets turning our steely minds and our iron wills to hot putty. Why, you could wave those things around like sports banners, or hang 'em up like room fresheners, no-pest-strips, or keep 'em around for paper towels, moist towelettes, personal hygiene products, bandages, or stuff them into air duct filters, car defrosters, you name it.

It goes a long way toward explaining Reality TeeVee, liquid cheese-like ooze pumped into perfectly good pizza crusts, the Bieber-Cyrus conspiracy, auto-tuning...

It goes a long way to explaining why Google, owner of the planetary money supply, feels the constant need to play feminine hygiene commercials to me, over and over again, while I rub my 3-day growth of beard in blank wonder. The commercials often launch their inane mayhem without warm-up or warning, just -- *BAM!* -- in the middle of a concert note or in mid-syllable of a spoken word of dialogue. Sometimes, the commercials at the front are longer than the video

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clip I hope to someday see.

It goes a long way to explaining why it is that powerhouse Universal Studios feels the overwhelming need to forcibly jam commercials and previews down my personal throat, on DVDs and Blu-rays I have purchased, before I am allowed to access the program I have purchased. Preventing my access in any way to my purchase, before first battering me with mandatory advertising, is a great way for me to learn avoiding doing business with you, Universal.

It goes a long way toward explaining why we are all forced, on our DVDs and Blu-rays, to sit through mandatory screen after screen of warnings and disclaimers: Yes, it's an FBI crime to copy the thing. Yes, it's not a victimless crime. Yes, we understand the penalties involved -- almost as intimately as if they have been levied directly against us. Yes, we understand the Interpol warning screens will now commence in all 6,493 languages of the world, starting..... **NOW**

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- *Thing is, bozos -- you are preaching to the choir. □ See, we've already PURCHASED this disc, so, just bugger off, will you?!*

It even goes a long way to explaining why you feel the need, in today's hyper-litigious twitchiness, to lecture us over and over again why it is, exactly and precisely, any opinions we may hear, during the movie, during the special features, and throughout our entire lifetimes -- in this world and any other potential worlds we may or may not experience -- are in now way the opinions of the following 279 production personnel, by name and favorite color, and their companies, logos, and corporate filings. And earnings reports.

Yes, it all goes a long way toward explaining so much. Like the spinning doors from Congress into lobbyists offices and think tanks, following the self-perpetuating, insider circuit of power and juice and money and prestige...

... and the mortgage and banking crises, CEO pay and bonuses, oil industry cheerleaders writing oil policy, mountaintop removal, selection of the "Homeland" moniker for naming our domestic security efforts in a suspiciously fascist nomenclature, for explaining why the unemployed vastly outnumber jobs, for tax policies benefitting those needing no benefits, for

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corporate welfare, for jobs fleeing overseas for decades while patriotic companies gut our economy, for massive and unending income and opportunity inequality, for all the vulture capitalists who have taught us that *tearing down* is what floats the country and pays the bills and *not* building back up -- for the trillions of dollars the rich have parked out of taxation's fair reach, for the skyrocketing costs to the average person of education, medicine, housing, transportation...

It goes a long way toward explaining the vanishing American Dream and the withering of our standard of living and high ranking in the world in nearly every category of achievement... not to mention an endless parade of all the other mind-boggling, dumbfounding events bothering you and bothering me, and for all the things that continue to make no Earthly sense.

- Now, we have big, foam hands. We have third-world status, and we have people too dumb to see who is really to blame -- the people urging them to blame everyone sane.

Yes: I wonder about such things, about everything. But, then, I'm still playing footsie with the concept that, instead of paying off the banks, during the financial crisis, we could have given the same amount of money to the people, for them to use in paying off their mortgages. It wouldn't have cost us more -- it might have even cost less. And, in the end, the banks would still have all the money, just like then. Just like now.

Tantalizing, dangerous stuff. You start down that high-concept road, playing *What If*, and then, you start to wonder: Why on Earth are we here, you and I -- any of us -- and what on Earth are we really doing about anything, anyway? We talk a good game, but, in the end, our individual efforts are puny against massed wealth and power.

- We could defeat almost any problem, you and I, if we all banded together and drove hard in one direction at a time. But that will never happen. The Powers That Be enjoy keeping us on and at one another's necks too much -- it keeps them comfy and relaxed, knowing we'll never gang up on them, and never spoil their gravy train, never force them to make changes.

Each and every time, just before I decide to give up, finally and forever, and simply stop caring, until the end of time, I find myself trying to take Kurt Vonnegut's advice as much as possible, and believe, as much as I can, that we're really just here to fart around, as he put it.

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I suppose it's my only braking mechanism, humor, the only one left that still works.

I'd prefer to believe we are all here, each of us, for a higher purpose than simply making more money for someone else, for some corporation -- here for a purpose other than our continued consumption of goods and services, here only to help keep things going around and around, without end...

- ... no matter what the world seems bent on insisting is true.

Thank goodness for laughter. Thank goodness for friends, for helping make sense of an insane world, when you get lost in it. And helping you find your hat. And your way home again, after you've been blown *waaaaay* off course.

Cheers.

Amygdala mandala: http://www.alternet.org/story/155210/why_is_the_conservative_brain_more_fearful_the_alternate_reality_right-wingers_inhabit_is_terrifying

and: <http://www.alternet.org/news-amp-politics/are-republican-brains-different>

Nelson Mandela: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nelson_Mandela

mandalas: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandala>

Jump-off item One -- The Quesarito: <http://www.npr.org/blogs/thesalt/2014/06/09/320354712/sandwich-monday-taco-bells-quesarito>

Jump-off item Two -- Oxytocin: <http://rosarubicondior.blogspot.com/2014/06/love-hormone-dogs-creationism.html>

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and: <http://www.geekosystem.com/dog-oxytocin/>

Today's Bonuses:

PG: Serpentine!

<http://www.tcm.com/mediaroom/video/465903/In-Laws-The-Movie-Clip-Serpentine-.html>

PG-13: Run Away! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=92gP2J0CUjc>

PG-13: Zappa, Cheepnis, and Frunabulax: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gzxa49fefq8>

Beatles - Get Back [home]: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3PXaWFy1fpl>

Super-extended version: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vUHuCWkltqw>

Today's *Bonus* Bonus:

Go to YouTube. ☐ Check out "Bad Lip Reading." ☐ You will be happy you did. ☐ Lots to choose from. (Hint: ☐ Bring oxygen. ☐ You will be laughing. ☐ A lot.)