

Wake Me When We're Star Trek

Written by Alex Baer

Tuesday, 04 March 2014 18:48

Every once in a while, I want to write a note, roll it up, and jam it into a old milk bottle. The scribbling part is easy. The tough part comes when trying to decide where to deliver it. There are not many outlets around willing to accept delivery on such a thing, and even fewer staff people able or interested enough to pay much attention to such a note, especially for one beginning this way:

"I see by the clock on the clubhouse wall, and by the full-faced frown on the burly, white-uniformed orderly I can't seem to shake, that it's time for a nice, hot cup of Thorazine and some phosphene therapy, staring off into space, my eyes shut tight..."

Such lightless light shows like this, like life, are sometimes called "prisoner's cinema." This seems fitting. I often feel like a prisoner of my era, of this historical cycle in which we are now treading water, waiting for the next chapter to start, the next shoe to drop, the next shot from the starter's pistol, the next tick of the clock...

"Prisoner's Cinema" seems like a fine name for an indie rock band, too, along with a perfectly fine name for this era of human history. Here's the thinking here: There's the allusion to the cult British TeeVee show, "The Prisoner," a fine example of 60s sci-fi paranoia and queasy, creeping lack of control by private citizens -- a helpful mindset to already have deployed for all that would come to pass in the increasing losses of years ahead.

The "Cinema" part? That's easy. It's a handy metaphor for our sitting in the dark, and our passive, listless, detached, unspoken observations.

Taken together, the two-word tag paints a Grim Reaper future, and a cold, bony hand pointing the way to the Dark Ages.

A smidge depressed? Sure, I guess -- in the same way the Titanic got a bit damp. I get this way whenever I hear Teabaggers ramble, or when I catch a grating earful of Republican psycho-babble, or when I ponder the trauma done to people's abilities to think critically as well as creatively by various manic, media-all-star meltdowns.

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Somehow, I flash back to the third century BCE, and find myself amid the papyrus scrolls of the Ancient Library of Alexandria. I speculate, idly, where our species might be today, if we had had fewer invasions to launch, fewer wars to endure, fewer years to wear the Knowledge Disintegration Cloak known as the Dark Ages, when the Library was burned, knowledge boiled off, and learning fled in flames.

That loss set us back a thousand years, fifteen hundred years, two thousand years. Humanity's choppy bedtime tale is one of wobbly head shakes, helpless shoulder shrugs, hapless pawing at the dusty, rocky ground with our the edges of our boots and feet.

One step forward, a couple dozen eras back; repeat. Ad nauseam. Caveat humanus.

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There's some shorthand I could use for that note in the bottle. "Damn shame we're not *Star Trek*," I would probably write, not trying to hide my sadness or disappointment. I would hope people coming across the note would figure out I wasn't having a problem with the current lack of warp-drive vehicles, phasers, and photon torpedoes.

I would hope I wouldn't have to explain the shorthand -- but, I suppose I would have to do so, given this era of war after war, given the cycle of continual conflict bankrupting nations and their peoples, given the love of gadgets.

Weirdly, this is a period in which we're in love with the technology logic creates, while simultaneously detesting logic in all other areas of life. We like the payoffs from technology and the ease it brings. We just have no use for the hard work making those payoffs come true.

So, given all that, some explaining would have to be done. I'd start, and continue, at least until some faint glimmer of recognition was detected. Those *Star Trek* hopes would sound like this:

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- Every person is warmly welcomed into this world, especially as we each arrive with no memory of having requested our own birth.
- Each person is to receive ample food, clothing, shelter, medical care, and education -- and, best of all, a chance for self-discovery, in which each person comes to know his or her strengths, talents, abilities, and is able to choose a rewarding life path benefitting that individual, and, as a result, society is also well served.

Everything else falls into place, via the immutable force of self-interest, fueled by education, tempered by ample opportunity, encouraged through a lack of fear. Voila. Nice dream.

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When I am beyond mere frustration in this era, submerged in despair, and feeling booted to some stratosphere of regret and sense of loss, my hand finds a way to a thwarted humor. My fingers make the words, *Wake me when we're Star Trek*.

Humor is a survival instinct, like meat-based circuit breakers. It's a way to encourage my head from going *boom!* today.

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This time -- and it's always something, with each new thing more outrageous than the one before it -- it's quantifying the amount families pay in *welfare tax* each year. The tax I'm talking about is paid to the biggest welfare queens in the country: Corporations. Enormously profitably corporations. Corporations whose profits are, given their level of taxpayer support in difficult times, simply obscene.

Depending on how you figure things, the average family hands over \$6,000 a year to keep corporations sailing along -- corporations in danger only from sinking beneath the weight of their record-breaking profits.

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The Reagan-spewed meme is one of welfare queens in their Cadillacs, when, in fact, the U.S. easily spends twice as much on corporate welfare as it does on food stamps -- \$92 billion vs. \$59 billion for 2006, to grab randomly at a steadily stream of stats blasting past.

In return, of course, corporations have pushed to get their taxes chopped in half in the last 10 years and jettisoned 3 million jobs in the U.S. The mass firings helped the bottom line look artificially fat, and CEOs raked in bonuses for helping to shred the American Dream.

Something has gone terribly wrong about that bargain, about that dream, for the average person. It has morphed over the years. The unspoken agreement was *Everyone Wins -- We're All in This Thing Together*.

The agreement now is

Greed Wins -- Sorry About Your Luck.

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No, it's not just about the very few who end up owning The Rule-Making Apparatus in this country, and using their money and power to jockey and lobby for rules to help them acquire even more money and power -- although that's certainly a part of it. I've never had any problem paying taxes, even on skimpy pay, because I know that paying taxes, as Oliver Wendell Holmes said, is the price we pay for civilization.

It's the fairness factor that's vaporized from the equation, along with so much else. It's cheaper to fire the workforce and move the operation abroad, if workers dare to suggest they can no longer live on the same wages paid a decade ago and more. It's easier to collapse a company on paper after raiding the pension fund, then shoo everyone out and restart operations under a new name, hiring everyone back at half-wages. And so on.

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We are living in a time where information delivery is nearly instantaneous, and almost none of the information is trustworthy, or without heavy bias, or propaganda-free. Thanks to consolidation -- a basic abandonment of community service requirements in order to service corporate greed -- we now have fewer media voices than ever before. Most of the remaining voices are cheerleaders to various cliques of money, power, politics, and propaganda.

Our abilities to think critically are numbed by daily exposure to the backwash of pop culture and dumbed down via emphasis of fancy over fact. Infrastructure crumbles while the rich unpatriotically balk at paying a reasonable tax load during a time of continual wars of convenience. The rich moan about 15% taxes, oblivious to the 90% rates paid by their grandparents, or even the 45 to 70 percent paid by their parents.

The income gap widens, more people fall through the cracks as the numbers of those who need help increase -- all while there are fewer funds for such programs. No matter what, we have not yet found a way to eat bombs or tax breaks as nourishment.

And yet, we always manage to build jails while schools go hang. Like in Philadelphia, among other places. Well, at least the kids will have a place to hang out. Jails, unlike schools, still have a thriving hot lunch program.

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I am reminded once again that Mark Twain was right when he said, "Every time you stop a school, you will have to build a jail. What you gain at one end you lose at the other. It's like feeding a dog on his own tail: It won't fatten the dog."

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We're using our resources stupidly, and using up the planet faster all the time. Look at some fresh fruit out of season in your grocery store and you're looking at a container of fossil fuels, and its pollution, to haul it from half a world away. The list is endless in this regard. It is stunning and sad.

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But that never stops absurd events, like the corporation having 100-year-old homestead cabins dismantled and shipped a thousand miles, then reassembled inside a corporate headquarters for atmospheric use as snack sites. Yes: It's good old Twitter, throwing around some fashion-plate money for blue-plate dress-up games.

In my note scribbled amongst the orderlies, I would falsely claim Albert Einstein said something he did not, simply because I wanted to go with an excellent fit of preference over fact -- a tactic used daily by Fox. In my note, I would say this: *As Einstein always said, twits with money are still twits.*

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Today, we've made many advances of which we should be justly proud. For example, one in four Americans now believes the sun goes 'round the Earth. One in five Americans lacks reading skills beyond the 4th grade level -- a rate that's flatlined for the last decade.

That's better than the days of the Ancient Library of Alexandria, I suppose, and not quite as limited as serfdom would have been in the Dark Ages -- although we're certainly pushing for a new serfdom and a new Dark Ages today. Consider this a copycat bumper crop, this Great Recession -- a corporate gift, a leftover from the back of the fridge, a blessing from its granddaddy, the Great Depression.

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India's just come up with a pro-corruption political party for "schemers and fraudsters." True, it's a tongue-in-cheek attempt to bring awareness to certain problems there. We could take a page from their playbook. I think the Apathy Party has a chance here, along with the Superstition Party, the Mind Abduction Party, the Against Our Own Self Interest Party, The Extremely Low-Information Party, The Lawn-Vehicles-Up-On-Blocks Party, the (Im)Patiently Waiting for the Karmic Wheel to Turn Party...

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I think that my hastily-scratched note in the bottle is best used as a substitute for a teeny ship being inside there -- you know, as a hobby display piece. Having those complaints enshrined in a bottle sure won't bring any help, not like the message-in-a-bottle attempts of the past. And that note won't be used for light down any dark corridors, and sure as heck won't be used as the wick in a Molotov cocktail, during any heated protests for meaningful, lasting changes.

Like the culture, the orderlies here simply wouldn't permit it. Not anytime soon, anyway.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phosphene>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Prisoner

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Library_of_Alexandria

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corporate_welfare

<http://www.commondreams.org/view/2013/09/23>

<http://thinkbynumbers.org/government-spending/corporate-welfare/corporate-welfare-statistics-vs-social-welfare-statistics/>

<http://qz.com/74271/income-tax-rates-since-1913/>

Figure your own tax burdens, including sub-sub-sub-categories -- and be stunned to learn how much is for corporations: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/2012-taxreceipt>

<http://www.alternet.org/education/7-most-absurd-things-americas-kids-are-learning-thanks-conservative-gutting-public>

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<http://www.alternet.org/education/philly-closes-23-public-schools-generously-builds-400-million-prison-where-kids-can-hang>

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2572249/Twitter-installing-log-cabins-headquarters.html>

<http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2014/02/14/277058739/1-in-4-americans-think-the-sun-goes-around-the-earth-survey-says>

<http://www.zerohedge.com/news/2013-02-13/23-america-illiterate>

<http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-news-from-elsewhere-26418440>

Today's Bonus:

You have to love the fact-checking done by local news-gathering organizations anymore:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w7_-GwleTAK

For epic fails by national media fact-checkers, check out the "Yes Men" here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OazUh0Ym8rc>

and here:

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmuF3SJhWI4>