

Hopalong Banshee

Written by Alex Baer

Saturday, 30 January 2016 14:15

It's the Age of Superheroes, among other burdensome identifiers of today.

(Such titles are the darlings of media and marketing, and are among the clusters and clutter of many clumsy, clunky ways of trying to figure out What On Earth is Happening Right Now, I realize, but it's better than the Age of Ignorance and Arrogance, as titles go -- GOP- and Trumpian-fandom and other related Fox-like IQ-slides aside.)

Perhaps superhero-dom is all the rage because all our problems seem so big, so unresolvable, so permanent, and so unyielding to our constant, hapless tinkering. Maybe it's just the mathematical result and automatic fun which comes from unchecked population increase where, thanks to sheer body-count growth, we still have the same basic percentage of lunatics, fools, morons, and village idiots, but -- Hey! -- where did all YOU yahoos come from? we say.

(Happened quickly, didn't it? Yeah, it always does, when you're not paying attention, otherwise it wouldn't be very sneaky or stealthy, so says one of my new superheroes, Major Oblivion -- a longtime chum of Captain Obvious and General Mayhem.)

Today, however, we're going to check in with Hopalong Banshee, last of the Old-Time, New-Age, Wild West, Back-East Existentialists, and see if we can make any sense out of recent events and figure out What On Earth is Happening Right Now.

Banshee, being an all-rounder of a TimeLiner, not only collects healing crystals, but gazes into orbs of them as well, trying to suss out the future as well as the past. Being a logical, modern type -- but still firmly set in his steampunk ways -- he's updated his tech recently, so, let's see what's on the *Crystal BallWall Screen 3000* (TM)...

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There is a news report on, apparent coverage of the latest armed takeover by Mammon "Ammo" Bungy and Cloven "Hoof" Bungy. It's a two-site project this time, by the looks of things,

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involving -- *well, I'll be* -- one, an armed assault at NRA headquarters, and the other being an armed uprising and *really* hostile takeover of that new AK-47 plant in Pompano Beach, Florida!

Gads, the Irony Channel comes in *clear as a bell* here!

*

"Lessee what else is on," says Hopalong, trying out a hot-wired remote control unit the size of an end table, shifting the 2-inch cables with a heave of the thing, and hip-shot-aiming it at the *Crystal BallWall Screen 3000* (TM)...

Here, the Bungys came onscreen again, on this other channel, somehow. This time, there were hundreds of them, or their teams, anyway, according to all the red splotches on the news-station's graphic of the national map.

We squinted, shaking our heads, trying to make sense of things.

"Must be from the future," said Hopalong. "They're everywhere in the TimeLine now, worse'n those fake hillbillies at Duck Dynasty," he added with disgust, arcing a chewing-tobacco spit-ball at a spittoon 3 car lengths away, banking it off the side rim with a mighty clang.

"Filthy habit," he says, by way of explanation, "and I should quit it, I know." A moment's pause passes. "Duck Dynasty," he drawls impatiently, "although the chaw-tobacco ain't doing me no favors with the ladies, either, a-course."

Back on screen, we watch as the news recaps the current crisis.

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"Authorities say at least 27 airports have been affected so far," the newscaster gargled in something almost approximating calm and control. "The Bungys have again called for grazing rights under the taxiways and runways of the airports, and have called for their being the sole American rights-holders, and also solely able to lease or lend these rights to those only they themselves deem fit."

Hopalong shot the *Crystal BallWall Screen 3000* (TM) an evil eye. "Fit, my left hoo-hah!"

The newscaster fumbled among the normally decorative paper sheets on the desk, trying to uncover actual news updates from the usual blank pages placed there by set dressers.

"Apparently," the news reader gulped, "the Bungys also want the air rights over the entire country, airports and everything," said the newscaster, holding his arms straight out at his sides in the first throes of honest panic, "including all broadcasting stations and cell towers and phone companies and what-not," the newscaster conceded in a dulled frenzy, unable to lay hands on the report for which he had frantically searched.

"Oh, great," said Hopalong. "The Bungy States of 'Merica, just up ahead by a few years, from the looks of things on this TimeLine. Wonderful -- right up there with a hot poker in the patootie!" he said, in a wrinkle-faced burst of open loathing.

As we watched the news anchor melt into jangled despair and partially coherent phrases, there was a sudden explosion from the far right rear corner of the working television studio's set -- chunks of office furniture and debris were flying willy nilly, jetting away from the center of the blast, in a terrific hurry to be anywhere except right there, right then.

Gradually, as the assorted particulate matter cleared, we could see armed gunmen storming into the TV studio in forest camo uniforms and balaklavas, brandishing weapons of all kinds -- assault weapons, shotguns, crossbows, flamethrowers...

Then, one gunman ran toward the camera and stood dead center of it, his broad grin and beard stubble revealed by an opening in his knit face mask, holding a couple of hand-scrawled signs:

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This is Bungy-TV

, said one of the cards. The other read,
Send us all your money

.

"Cheese and gumdrops," exclaimed Hopalong. "Way worse than them nitwit televangelists, and they ain't no Sunday picnic hams by themselves," he spat, reaching for the remote. "Gonna have to look into this idiot TimeLine for durn sure..."

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We spent a few minutes remote-channelling, and channel-surfing, using various features of the *Crystal BallWall Screen 3000* (TM). Hopalong had scowled nearly every minute of the ten-minute preset journey. We had seen multiple TimeLines, and just about every form of modern-day, cross-wired, meltdown-madness possible. Hopalong was clearly shook up by the experience.

"In just a few minutes, we seen as how more people every year are tryin' to tote loaded, ready-to-shoot guns in their carry-on luggage on board airplanes -- just 15 years after Nine-Eleven," he moaned, shaking his draped head from side to side.

"What in hell's that about, that number shootin' up every year?" Hopalong foamed, then, regrouping slightly, added, "so to speak."

He was right. Almost 2,700 firearms were seized at airports in 2015, up 20 percent from the previous year, which was itself a record-breaker. And, even worse, more than four out of every five guns seized in airport carry-on bags were loaded, awaiting a quick trigger pull.

Hopalong had on a dark cloud for a hat. He was on a roll and hardly finished, I could tell.

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(I didn't have the heart to tell him about the latest attempt to coax money from consumers' pockets -- fashion firearm accessories for women. I didn't think I could withstand another withering lecture, just then, on the evils of marketing and the absurd silliness of the human animal to be lured down every possible avenue of gullibility, and stupidity, especially as I was an honorary choirmaster and songbird in this particular sanctuary of song, here in our own little TimeGuard Headquarters we affectionately call The Chamber of Sanity.)

Hopalong wound himself up for another go at reality.

"Then, we see a TimeRipple on the 'screen about how some dirtbag, so-called *leaders* in Flint, Michigan, have been purposefully killing and maiming their very own townfolk with poisoned water --

water their own industries poisoned, under the unseeing eye of these so-called leaders -
- all when they had a perfectly good source of clean water they used in before-times..." he gasped, coming up for air, "then dumping it all through another layer of poison into the idiot lead pipes all through town!" he shouted, coming unstuck around the edges.

"I mean, 900 times the safe levels of lead in some homes' water?" he hollered.

He went over to a section of the Banshee Cave wall, kicked a spot on it, near the floor, and a chunk of the rock wall spun around, revealing a sofa and wet bar. He plopped down on it.

"Dang, but I mean -- I never heard of anything like *this* kind of lead pipe cinch," he blurted, "although I'd like to introduce them

s *leader*
to a
section of that same pipe."

It was quiet for a few minutes, there in our secret laboratory-fortress and rumpus room. We sat for a time, and we were still, only the trickle of some distant underground stream echoing lazily though the vast, cathedral-ceilinged complex.

"People don't have the simple sense anymore to know what day and time it is," sighed Hopalong.

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(I hadn't the heart to mention the Chicago-based Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists -- that they will again be considering the status of its Doomsday Clock's minute hand come Tuesday. The clock, signifying the closeness of civilization's doom from our own inventions, is based on the number of minutes we are from midnight, which now sits at three minutes to twelve. It was moved up from five minutes the year before, based on climate change and nuclear weapons.)

I stifled the urge to say, "Fukushima!" as I sneezed.

"Oh, hell," Hopalong grouched, opening the drinks console. "What'll it be -- foreign or domestic?"

My mind raced, but hit firm ground in a second. "Dunno -- where do you most trust the water, these days, for your brew?"

Hopalong looked at me for a moment like I'd just grown a set of antlers, then his booming laugh slowly took over his face and frame. "You got a point there," he conceded. "I was gonna say *fo reign*, because *domestic* appears to be nothing but Crazy Water nowadays..."

"How about a Mars-Lite?" I ventured, unable to resist giggling some.

We settled on Guinness, because, after all, there has been decades of advertising that *Guinness is good for you* -- and, after all, we agreed, advertising and marketing and media, well, *they're always right*.

(This angle was always good for extended laughter in our group.)

Hopalong improved our moods enormously by changing the channel on the *Crystal BallWall*

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Screen 3000 (TM)

over to the Cosmic Delight feed, where we watched live coverage of Olympus Mons, on Mars, the solar system's tallest mountain -- shield volcano, really.

It stands almost 16 miles high, or almost three Everests tall.

Its cone base is as wide as Spain.

The only way we could wrap our heads around it? Imagine something 16 miles away, here on Earth, and tilt that same distance up into the sky. That'll get you thinking differently, after a hard day TimeLining.

We agreed Olympus Mons was an amazing and beautiful thing, and that it was nice to get a little perspective after spending even a little time reviewing human activity and all its complex TimeLines, conundrums, paradoxes, and TimeRipples.

Saving our species from itself, bit by hard-won bit, would have to wait a while -- at least until we finished our stouts.

... and until we were back up to full strength, after Captain Obvious, Major Oblivion, and General Mayhem were back from the Fox TimeLine, with that whole Trump-Kelly-Ailes debacle successfully set in motion.

I think the team put that one together perfectly, and said so aloud, after draining my brew.

Hopalong, as I think I've said before, has a *very* infectious smile. Especially when he tastes a little victory in his mug.

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In this game, even a small win will help keep you going a little while longer.