

## Testing the Fabric of Space -- and Our Sanity

Written by Alex Baer

Wednesday, 25 January 2012 21:04 - Last Updated Friday, 27 January 2012 11:57

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The grating thing about unannounced or ongoing tests is not so much the surprise factor as never being quite sure what it is, exactly, that's being tested.

That suspicion intersects with another, that almost everything in and about life these days -- pick something, anything at all -- is really just meant as a test of our sanity, of how much we can take, how much craziness we can jam into the claustrophobically-closing, finite spaces all around us, and how much lunacy we can tamp down and cram in, into the potentially infinite space between our ears.

Our patience is under assault, too. I notice mine slipping further away, and at the same rate as that rising tide carrying Republican madness further up onto the beach with each tide and each wave.

But, as we all know from recent history, a rising tide lifts all yachts equally.

This is a test of critical thinking, this life, and we are sorry to report your chip installation may not have taken hold, that the skills were not booted up on the job, that your life is not working these head muscles or skills. Just as the Capitalists designed, for easier leading-around with that nose ring.

It's said the Industrial Revolution's most significant achievement was tethering humanity to a clock -- training us to punch in, and -- Presto! -- to punch out. The training today is much simpler: distract us with the shiny things, keep us off balance with the theatrical tussles and tumults of a two-party system, then ease us to unthinking sleep with teevee.

If you're still in the market for obvious examples of tests of our sanity, well, look no further than the Party of Lincoln, the Party of Eisenhower, the Republicans themselves.

Abe and Ike would mow down these morons with three sentences, once they recovered, in terrible awe, from the initial shock.

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To take any of these people seriously is to make an assumption they are, in fact, still human, that they can still be saved, that there's hope for them: *Won't you please give, today, until it helps, until we can all notice a difference?*

Even Nixon, for heaven's sake, is a liberal by today's standards. And, all by himself: *Here's a few more flatcars of crazy, in your name, for you, just sign here, on the bottom line, and he's all yours.* □ Thanks.

At this stage, I can only allege Republicans are still human, or that they can be still saved. It is slow work, the testing of proofs -- although the Republicans have, themselves, already and utterly proven the matter. Nothing left to do there. Might as well close up shop and go home, put my head in the oven, and hope that it's a gas range, and that I have matches, if I get impatient again.

Then, there is us, we humans, the Lilliputians, loosing the nuclear genie, hoping to slip reins on the Brobdingnagian behemoth, so's we can shout "Giddyup!" or "Whoa!" from its shoulders? Are you sure you want to do that?

There was discussion, way back, in the testing of splitting atoms, that the whole shooting match could go up in flames, that cracking open atoms might, possibly, maybe, ignite the atmosphere.

If we had to make that "go / no-go" decision today, how'd you like any of the current batter-dipped, twice-baked, deep-fried, butter-headed gaggle of Republican presidential candidates in on that particular decision?

Meanwhile, there are interesting things afoot in science today. I can hardly wait to see what the Greedy Ol' Party's frontrunners will say when asked about some of these things, during the big debates, this portentous and regularly stunning, meetings of minds.

There is the Large Hadron Collider, for example -- an ongoing source of awe and a regular

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workout of the squinting muscles around my own eyes, trying to upload what they're doing these days.

One proposal is to produce a laser, a beam of light so powerful this time, that it would be equivalent to the solar power planet Earth receives, but focused down to a prick of light no bigger than a pin.

Scientists claim it could hold enough force, that tiny pinprick, to boil away the fabric of space, the vacuum of space.

*Say -- Are you hearing that musical saw, too?*

"Ghost particles" will be investigated. Right up there with the concept of "Dark Matter," isn't it, to get your mind doing calisthenics? Can't wait to get the Newt's take on this one - filled with florid, marshmallowy insights, no doubt.

But, there's no shortage of Republicans here. They can hardly wait until our Defense Department gets its hooks into this action. The mega-profits are already dancing cartwheels in their heads, in white leather go-go boots, like nuclear-mutated, sugar-plum-flavored sheep, lulling them to disco fantasy and pointy-collared sleep.

By the way, as long as we're in the neighborhood, let's drop in on this thought, too: Let's drop the crummy public relations ploy, can't we, and go back to calling it the War Department, since that's all it does, makes wars. It doesn't do any defense or defending --just offense, always offending. A little truth in advertising couldn't hurt more than the scheme we have now.

Or, would that be getting a little too real for today's sensitive palates? If that's too close to the bone, let's take a break:

Whoops, sorry: Just when you thought you might adopt a Tribble, or try some of that green

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brandy after the crazy day \**YOU'VE*\* had, here come the Klingons and Romulans again, cloaked --or, Great Caesar's Ghost! -- the Ferengi!

These sci-fi Republicans, trying to cash in again, always crashing around, grabbing, taking, looting, pillaging, all dressed up like Hannibal, all saying, "All mine!"

Maybe Republicans were never taught to share their toys. That could account for much, including that vapid motto, the one about the person with the most toys winning, at the end, when we die -- that point of time when we couldn't take anything material from this world if we tried, not even if you gave out a hokumed-up title to the Grim Reaper, one giving away our Moon, one giving away title to the place, filled to the brim with golden-gated condominium communities, stuffed full with golden-parachuted, amateur-status reapers galore.

Speaking of cloaking, it was just announced today, that we're getting a brand new test. Our sanity's getting another nudge closer to the brink.

This is because researchers report successfully cloaking a three-dimensional object, making it invisible from all angles. The "New Journal of Physics" noted scientists at the University of Texas at Austin pulled off the trick not by using an over-draped carpet to cloak an object, as had been previously thought workable, but by making an object invisible to light in "free space."

So, uh, how long do you think that space will be free, once Republicans invade the thing? Or, if politics is not your cup of hemlock, how about a broader perspective, one in which any one of us monkeys could be trusted with such things? Running with scissors is what we do, accidentally, and on purpose, too, for laughs.

Clever we got in spades. You want wise? Try another galaxy.

Somewhere along the line, a fine old tradition got scrapped: Used to be, once upon a time, that going crazy was its own reward -- a "Get Out of Life Free" card, delivered by the Good Sanity Fairy, when all the mind's circuits and fuses popped, tripped, fused, hit the wall, scrambled.

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Now, unplugging the sanity module has no benefit of quiet, no picturesque contemplation in idyllic, park-like settings, no rest for the heavy baggage of the mind.

Now, it's just normal anymore, all the rage, flipping out, losing your mind. The Republicans have. Why not all the rest of us, too?

Oh, right -- because we are the adults, and because we are always the ones to do the cleaning-up after one of their epic drunks, the kind that go on for decades.

So, what the hell -- go nuts.

You're belly-flopping or cannon-balling into a pool already teeming with rabid, foaming-at-the-mouth dog-paddlers.

"Come on in," some of the Republican presidential candidates shout from the edge of the pool, "the Kool-Aid's fine!"

Some of the other candidate-debaters are busy, doubled up, examining their own and other's feet, picking between their toes, and other's toes, but take a moment to nod in unison, forgetting, mostly, what it was they were agreeing about, what topic it was that flew up into their faces for a moment, like startled pigeons.

All day long, I wonder how it was, or when it was, precisely, that our country jumped the tracks, went off its trolley, went around the bend? How we can get the choo-choo and all the cars set upright and loaded back onto the rails, how we can get this thing working again, this coast-to-coast enterprise, and making steam, doing the "Thomas the Tank Engine" Tango, all mated up with "The Little Engine that Could," singing and saying, "I think I can, I think I can," all of us. And, meaning it, too?

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No persons pitched me keys to the national railroad on the way out, requesting I watch the place a few minutes until they got back. It may not be a good way to spend time, wondering when the magic trick happened. But, as a hapless student of human nature, I sometimes find the forensics of the thing interesting in itself, with clues to motivations and intentions often littering the route, suggesting new courses of actions or repairs.

We could use some repairs. Other countries are hurtling along, flying in futuristic bullet trains, right now. We, of course, in our national railroad are -- literally and figuratively -- kicking the creosote-covered ties, we have the welders and patch kits broken out, we are surveying the wrecked, coal-fired nature of our undertaking.

Maybe we should just keep concentrating on being seen in the locomotive, at the engineer's station, large and in charge, or, out on the platform with an oil can and a rag -- you know, for photo opps, for the news -- or playfully fumbling around and joking, up on the cowcatcher, up front, maybe wiping the massive, glassy, Cyclops headlight. We can maybe get up enough steam to make the steam whistle wail, to yank on its tail, to draw attention to whoever it is that's making so much racket, to the one hanging on by a thread, pulling our cord, yanking our chain.

*All aboooooooooard!*

It's a shoe-in that humans have been a little, you know, wobbly upstairs, since we first fell out of trees, or heaved ourselves up on shore, or were dropped off by parent aliens, or whatever.

Thing is, the traits and talents that helped us get this far may not be the skills to take us the next piece of the way. Ever get that feeling, too?

Add to that the dumb luck of the species, us, and almost any one of us could -- *whoa!* -- wake up some morning to be Michele Bachmann, or, even worse, if that is remotely possible, to be one of the people voting soon to return her to office for the fourth consecutive time.

*Ahhhhhhhhhhh!*

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Is it Science Fiction, this life, or Horror, or Fantasy? What brand of farce or parody is it that farcically parodies itself? What alternative reality just whizzed past through here, indiscriminately replacing a random percentage of people in this world, with doppelgangers from other timelines, in some sort of a mandatory exchange-student program, located way up the universe's starry sleeve?

All I can be reasonably sure about any more, is that I went to sleep one night, as a kid of 12-approaching-lucky-13, somewhat around the time of the assassination of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy, then, I got up the next morning, like always -- but, this time, the world was toying with loopiness, it was pushing doolally peas around and around on a plate and muttering to itself, having full-but-empty-hot-cuppas of screwy, and making dates to go dancing with porangi fever and flair.

Welcome to the Culture, such as it is. It hasn't touched down yet, but keeps flying this Concorde of a nation all over, wheels up and then down, playing with the flaps, taking turns at the controls, flying too low, scaring chickens in the barnyard, shattering the sound barrier all over the place, everywhere it goes, making it almost impossible to hear yourself think.

The world is no doubt as weary of our adolescent nation and its fascination with its new activities book, "Adventures with Adrenalin," as a parent on Christmas day, praying for the batteries to burn out soon in a new toy, dear God, for the drumsticks to be lost, for the love of Pete, for the boombox to bust, already.

So, here we all are, in Eternity's Waiting Room, on a very nice planet, pulling and poking at it, banging our metal spoon on its upturned goldfish tank in machine-gunned bursts, clothes akimbo and the rhythm staccato, hauling what we can out of the toy chest and reading rack, yanking the stuffing out of the sofa, taking the armchair apart.

The Pool People, meanwhile, the remaining three hundred and seventeen, barkingly-insane Republican candidates in the field, have just become aware of the space you are occupying, or are trying to occupy, and -- oh, crap: Here they come, they're not even stopping to dry off the Kool-Aid, they're coming this way, they're on a dead run, right straight at you...

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Quick! Pick one! In case the Republicans get in, pick somebody for the National Science Foundation! Somebody for the president's science advisor!

Oh, right: We should also pick a mind, too -- not just some body.

Not just some empty suit.