

Stuff Happens, Cross Your Fingers.

Written by Alex Baer

Thursday, 29 March 2012 18:03

Humanity has a bunch of rabidly-serious, snarling-mad problems, not the least of which is a god-complex that sooner or later gets in the way, swaggering in, sure we can save the day. Otherwise, humans tend to be binary, mostly switch off, do little to nothing constructive, leaving end-results to The Fates, to an assortment of denominational gods and goddesses.

In the latter scenario, we eventually despair, throw ourselves on the fire of last resort -- Science -- and expect its wizardry to sort everything out, help remove our well-toasted behinds, roasted *glutes*, and charred butts from the inferno. The track record here is spotty, maybe 50-50 on a good day, despite some really impressive showstoppers -- returns from the space program, amazing leaps in medicine, too.

Hope, as we know, springs eternal, may well be the only thing keeping us inside, off the ledges. Case in point: Repairs on one 1995 model car, starting its Big Fade, the point at which repair costs begin to offset a monthly charge for all-new, a toss-or-fix tableau of Americana, not much contemplation for nirvana.

Fixing anything on an old car sends anticipatory shudders through every old component, triggering a "me-next" choir from anything left that's still original. This is why so many people driving old cars do so with crossed fingers, hoping nothing breaks, hoping nothing will start the choir-eternal. Hope is the thing.

Not to be outdone in their own machinations with machines, people in Japan have everything crossed, for good luck and hope, while living white-knuckled lives, especially around Fukushima, and here's more reason why: Ten times the lethal dose of radiation has been detected inside a reactor chamber at the plant.

A spokesman for the plant operator says that the testing equipment would last only 14 hours under such harsh conditions, and that "we have to develop equipment that can tolerate high radiation." Clean-up is now being discussed in terms of *decades*.

Recapping the list: three reactors in meltdown, with more than half the melted fuel breaching

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the core; one vessel thought to have more than 32 feet of water keeping things cool was found to have water only about 24 inches from the bottom; radioactive water keeps escaping into the sea, with who knows how much vented into the air; and, two buildings suffering hydrogen explosions, big enough to damage the structures...

Any added details here would be overkill to the simple point: humans have nothing to swagger about, have no business trying to pull off magic tricks involving whole populations and the planet, have no right to play any type of god -- not when the downside of *whoops-a-daisie* means so much going so horribly, horribly wrong.

Here, it is good to pause and remember we are speaking of Japanese engineering, thought by many to be second to none, or surely on any list of the Big Three. To their endless, everlasting credit, the Japanese people -- whose country and culture is the only one so far bombed with atomic weapons in war -- have seen the light, pulled the plug on nuclear energy, taken all but one of their 54 plants offline, with the last one set to stop in May.

We could take an excellent lesson from such forward-thinking people burned -- almost melted down -- by their experiences, juggling the sun. A crash-dive, Manhattan Project-style program for alternative and renewable energies is very highly recommended, *coming onto the charts at number one with a bullet.*

Won't happen though: It makes too much sense, it would provide a zillion jobs here at home, would cut into oil profits and their own,

um

, encouragement schemes.

Instead, let us turn our attention to Homer Simpson, running a nuke plant, over-sugared after too many boxes of *donuts*, in the good 'ol USA -- on second thought, please don't: The OK was recently given to build two, brand-new nuclear facilities in Georgia, making them the first to be built here since the partial meltdown at Three Mile Island in 1979. *Ha*
ve another donut?

If you think nasty nuke accidents can't happen here, you would be wrong -- one already has, in California, during operation of the Sodium Reactor Experiment, one run from 1957 to 1964, hushed up like all get-out, as the very first commercial power plant in the world to ever experience a core meltdown.

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(If you would care to know how thoroughly things can go south, search YouTube for documentaries about Chernobyl -- and, England's experiences, too, at Windscale.)

Nuke plants here are also aging, with back-up systems showing signs of neglect -- with gear and systems unexpectedly relocated or just plain missing -- during tests. Sites report toxic materials leaking, leaching into the soil. Some experts warn we are heading for spent-fuel storage disasters that would make even Fukushima seem like a tipped tumbler of milk.

Just as you really don't want conversations about nuclear facilities to include phrases like "meltdown" and "hydrogen blasts," I can also safely say, you do not want a phone call from your efficient, knowledgeable, capable car mechanic to start out -- *swear it happened exactly this way* -- "I didn't mean to break off the steering wheel..."

By the way: We have 104 aging reactors in the United States, with operating licenses perpetually rubber-stamped and extended. Thankfully, there is just this one car -- no final thoughts yet regarding its own extended operating license.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2012/mar/28/fukushima-reactor-radiation-levels>

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

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