

Pinging in the Brain

Written by Alex Baer

Monday, 08 February 2016 16:52

Some stories seem to fade as soon as they appear, while others keep popping back into awareness, wanted or not.

In the language of *The Hunt for Red October*, which we screened again Sunday, some stories are "one-ping-only," while others pull "Crazy Ivans" for months and months at a whack.

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Yes, we have no TV access in our Little Boonieville, so our screen is used in a quaint, old-fashioned way, as a monitor for selected discs -- movies, documentaries, TV shows. Yes, we miss the still somewhat-sane channels, like PBS or BBC, but we do not yearn for the wallet-hosing expenses associated with cable, satellite dishes, pay-per-peek, uplinks, downloads, nor wireless brain-stem implants, where you change channels by winking and wincing.

So, instead of submersing ourselves into the Neanderthal abyss of the fleshed-wall-slammings, faux-warfaring antics of Concussive Brain Damage Theater, *aka The Big Game*, we sank down instead to the Bigger Deep, and ran the gamut of the Laurentian Abyss instead.

No, we're not snobs, we're simply not gluttons for punishment or pain. I mean, how many clanging, banging, crunching, clashing crashes does anyone have to watch to keep reproving what is already known -- that there are immovable objects and irresistible forces, and that most people attend NASCAR events, and football, for the gladiatorial bloodletting they hope will appear?

Or, for that matter, that humans, once bulked up, and Hulked-up, to the size of small landmasses, via the joy of mad-scientist chemistry sets run amok, are capable of swatting away opponents, such as Jeep Cherokees, with relative ease?

Or, for that matter, that the rare and precious gift of squeezing out perfect pigskin spirals is on a

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heavenly financial plane far above that of the grubbier chores of, say, merely leading a country, or readying children for their lives, or helping the elderly and ill transition away from their own?

I mean, have fun, consenting adults everywhere, but everyone gets to choose where to hang his or her entertainment and party hats. (Just now, I'd rather indulge in well-done fiction to almost any version of actual reality. I chalk up this reaction to Major Disbelief Syndrome, from actually paying attention to [involuntary shudder] the GOP *duh*-bates.)

Oh, I have no doubt you'd disagree with me when I say things like, "You wanna play foo'ball, then go get all that protective gear off and **go** for it -- *really go for it, now* -- and the first death loses the game for that team."

For your perspective, I also believe that hunters should be allowed to hunt, but only using a letter-opener, or a pen-knife, and with them outfitted in gym shorts and a muscle-tee. (We have no claws, we humans, so I allowed a tool, like a pen-knife, into this dream, you see.)

Otherwise, hunting is not much of a fair match, having a hunter all *comfy'd-up* in sub-zero, camouflaged protective gear, bringing down a bear with an AK-47, or with a sniper rifle from a quarter-mile away. Fair's fair.

And, as far as *that* goes, military theorizing aside, I also think that continuing to increasingly and sharply boost the use of drones to do our military dirty work is a really cowardly, if cost-effective, way of performing the relatively indiscriminate slaughter we seek.

The principle of standing off, and hurting the enemy, and doing so from a position where they cannot hurt you back, is a simple one. If your arms are long enough, you can slap and punch the bejesus out of someone with one hand, while holding them down, or stationary, with the other.

(Anyone from my third-grade class has the psychic bruises from that glandular-problem kid, Thor Coffinvald, to prove it.)

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I think winning has become so important to us that we've developed the protective moral calluses which prevent us from asking about the rightness, or *righteousness* of those actions -- *Whatever it takes! Whatever the cost!*
-- to win.

Or, more accurately, from the Vietnam War Playbook (recently updated): *Whatever it takes to create the impression, for the moment, that we are winning, or have already won.*

As in so many battling and contested arenas of life, a question seems to be missing, unasked, time and again: ***Just because we can, does that mean we should?***

As I have so often stated in the clear: I have no talent for answers; my questionable value on this planet appears to be one of observation and questioning. (Humor is sometimes involved, but not always, so, no tipping, please.)

Other than that iota of certainty, I can only say with an assurance that I am an alien on this world, dropped off here by mistake. Hardly anything makes sense to me. I may have been raised by wolves, maybe, or by early peoples who have since died off. Little is clear. No tribal records or traditions, or ways of being, were left behind. I have no dance steps painted on tanned leather skins, no secret *Twister* moves outlined in plant dyes...

... although I dimly remember something being impressed upon me, as a child, long ago. There is a voice, and I seem to be in a fog, in a place of clouds, where I cannot see my way clear, and the voice is slowly saying, like Marley's ghost, "*Measure twice... cut once.*"

Like you, I am in the dark a lot of the time.

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But, the story which captured my attention again, and seems to keep *pinging* back at me over time, months between breaks, is this one:

- *Refrigerators are being placed in public areas by charitable individuals or groups, for the use of homeless people.*

Sometimes, the cooling units are filled up with food by these charities or individuals, and are intended for people without resources or homes, so that they might not starve.

Sometimes, the homeless use the units to store the food they have been able to provide for themselves, but, being homeless, have no good or easy way to keep cool.

Another thing: There is still a lot of open sharing going on at this level of use, which is striking, I think, at this stunning level of need. No hoarders. Just people of incredibly modest means, sharing.

The stories of sharing come from all over. I have seen these stories come from the Middle East, from Africa, from places where heat and poverty is unimaginable to people such as we, who eat enough at an air-conditioned Super Bowl party to feed a village for a week or more.

- And, no, I have no idea how many super-sized bowls of food were put out, or consumed, or thrown away, at Super Bowl parties across the country, or at the stadium itself, or in all the corporate and celebrity super-boxes, nor do I have the ability to calculate how many homeless people could have been fed from this one event, either in terms of money spent nationally or in the numbers of vats of food and drink made ready...

(As I say, I have no answers at all -- only questions.)

The latest fridge story *pinging* at me comes from Berlin, where 25 such public food-sharing fridges might be shut down, over seemingly legitimate concerns which stem from a lack of hygienic operations of the units.

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I don't know the whole story there. But, I do know that this story of public fridges keeps trying to come back, popping up time and again, all over various points on the surface of this world -- like an idea that refuses to die.

I guess, for a lack of a better umbrella term, *people sharing* is the idea.

This story also reminds me of people and agencies which try to feed the homeless, and are prevented from doing so, or jailed for doing so, or run out of parks for doing so, and the ongoing criminal status always attached to those without any status, or status symbols: *being without a residence, being homeless*.

When we blow out the bottoms of our safety nets, and *allow* them to remain blown out, and people *still* try to step in and help anyway, I have decided this is a good thing, however naive or futile or short-termed the help may be. It is, at the very least, honorable and uplifting.

I mean, *I know how things work here*, but I don't know why they *continue* to work the way they do, when we are a people who are *capable* of change.

As I say: *No answers here*.

But, I can also tell you this: When I look at Trump, or Cruz, or Rubio, or Carson, or any of the empty suits constantly fielded for public office at all levels by the GOP, I do not feel honored or uplifted. And: I do not feel we are capable of change, or even human, sometimes.

I have this same disappointed feeling when I think of the Super Bowl. Or drones. Or failed fridge efforts for the homeless.

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It has taken some time to figure this out, but it may be because I have again read about Eugene V. Debs, read what he has thought about and said.

If there is a thing like a god, or God, I think there would be complete approval, and favor, of the things Debs thought and said. Even if there is not such an entity, it is easy to imagine any thinking, feeling human being would have a sense of being honored and uplifted after taking some time to consider his words.

I have pondered some of those words, this festive weekend, while balls were thrown about in the air to the giddy delight of millions, and I tell you that this crusty, cynical, disappointed curmudgeon felt honored and uplifted.

I was also reminded of the *astoundingly* wide gap between the mind and spirit of Debs, and the minds and spirits I see clustered together on these GOP debate stages.

I *could* say I see swine set among a pearl, at times like these, except Debs would blush from embarrassment, plus, I have no reason to so brutally slander swine.

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Meanwhile, in Make-Believe Land, balance and sanity has been achieved once again, in *The Hunt for Red October*, at least. I wish it were so easily accomplished in the real world -- you know, just hit the *play* button on the Life's Big Remote Control Unit, and let the inevitable, upbeat conclusion play itself out.

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The thing that keeps trying to *ping* me, over and over, here in Reality? The thing doing *Crazy Ivans* in my logic circuits?

- *You can either vote for The Rights of Money, or you can vote for The Rights of People.*

Unlike shared fridges and Super-footballs, it sure looks like we can't have both.

In fact, we keep proving it, over and over, with our immovable determination and irresistible persistence -- with our fears pushing us backward, instead of our hopes propelling us forward.

*

[from the next room]

When's the kick-off? □ November eighth? □ Man, oh man -- this pre-game show is interminable! Anyone want anything from the fridge? □ From the medicine cabinet? From the Little Philosopher's Self-Help Relativity-and-Sanity Guide? □ From the tool box -- like a rubber mallet, maybe?

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