

## Take Your Retraining Meds and Relax, Buddy

Written by Alex Baer

Monday, 29 October 2012 16:45 - Last Updated Monday, 29 October 2012 19:57

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It started out like a regular day, as I think back on it: Waking up, stumbling and side-stepping over the dogs on the way to the bathroom, then bumbling out to the kitchen to make coffee.

If I'd been more awake, I would probably have caught the first clue that *something* was out of whack somewhere...

*and that someone had better order more whack right away.*

OK, so I'll keep to the facts -- you say *everyone's* a comedian, I say everyone's a *critic*.

So, anyway: To notice the coffee maker was a slightly different size and shape right then required more lights on in the head that I had at that point, you know? To have noticed that the one on the kitchen counter was blue, and not black and that fake chrome -- well, that would have been just showing off, that early in the morning.

Plus, there was the usual morning blur to contend with -- dogs needing to go outside and back in, my partner getting ready to go off to work, the normal, choreographed chaos of morning -- a sort-of breakfast while sort-of making a lunch while sort-of listening to the half-tuned-in radio, while the dogs twirled below, happy to again see the stainless steel bowls of kibble hovering overhead and then become floorbound...

The normal routine. Nothing to get excited about, and certainly nothing warranting a shot of adrenalin. Quasi-aware sleepwalking was the norm and good enough. A splash of cold water on the face for a shock-treatment awake, and a fast interlude with a comb -- swatted around quickly, as a symphony conductor might make rapid swat attempts at a housefly with the baton -- and I was outside, in the car.

Errands: It's always good to get them out of the way early. don't you think? Everything worked as it always did in the car, but something felt a little odd -- something that was so far eluding me. Went down the just-in-case, hesitation-checklist: *wallet, shopping list, keys*. □ *OK, all good.*

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Now what would *you* do -- sit in the driveway with the car running, considering uneasy wisps of the mind, waiting for the car to run out of gas, or for the neighbors to call the *nice young men in the clean white coats* to please come take you away? Yeah -- me, too.

So, I pulled away, and went on to the first stop -- a discount store, one I really, really hate, and do everything possible to not have to shop in. But, out here in the almost-country, where the suburbs have yet to completely blow through the area like an atomic test blast, one has to make do and get Thanksgiving Day supplies where you can. Thought I might even get some sci-fi to read, and some other odds and ends.

And, that was my first clue: Slipped the car into a parking space, and headed inside OK, but slowed down mid-stride, aware something really big was not right. My mind picked it up before I did. It took me five or ten seconds to catch up. And then, there it was, right over the entrance and exit doors: a different sign.

"Christmart," it said. Big, white letters -- dirty, though, like Walmart's always were -- so, not new ones just put up. Same thing on all the doors. The same, but even stranger: The yellow smiley-face logos all had little yellow cartoon halos, suspended like they were sitting on little, yellow cartoony poles -- like a kid's angel costume, or something. *Whoa*. I looked around, trying to get my bearings.

Parking lot? Chipped up, scarred, oil-stained. *OK, normal*. How about that missing post by the right corner of the store? Yeah, it was still missing, this is still the same building -- I hadn't pulled into some brand new store's parking lot by mistake, as I was starting to think.

I had seen that concrete post taken out one day by some joker in a newer Surburban who backed into it fast, knocked it loose, then blasted away real fast.

It shot past me and I looked back -- I remembered seeing that the idiot driver had McCain-Palin stickers still on the rear windows. Remember, this is three-plus years after the election. That had stayed with me for some reason. Another proud pinhead who was going to keep protesting President Obama's being a black man in the White House, I figured.

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Just then, it started sprinkling again, and that got me refocused, outside in the lot. I started walking again, *shlumping* along in the parking lot with all the other automatons responding to the siren song of Big Capitalism and Big Savings to do some more *big bidniz*.

I did a double-take in the lobby. I was raised Catholic, so I know holy water rituals and genuflections when I see them -- except the wet-forehead crosses were administered by black-robed door greeters, and a slowing *scoot-dip* was all customers managed on the way in.

Squinting, I skipped this weirdness at the door, and slid past a greeter, outdistancing his puzzled call behind me, "Are you not a member of the holy savings club, brother?"

Real creepy, you know?

I raced around in the store, got the things I was looking for, but it took a while. They changed the store's layout again. I hate that. And, the check-out counters were a bizarre experience, too -- the black-robed cashiers all seemed sedate but blissed-out, like maybe their bosses had given them too much Thorazine today, or else they'd been shot with tranquilizer guns by management after the workers tried to get a union going -- who knows?

At that point, I could have been in the middle of a methadone clinic, for all I knew. Nothing made any sense. You know, I'd never been high or hooked on heroin or tried to kick it -- but my mind told me this could be what it's like to do everything, all at once.

I paid in cash, and didn't wait for the change. I just couldn't take looking into the cashier's *twirly*-fogged eyes again, and couldn't handle another one of those sing-songy, how'd-you-do interactions.

Plus, I had no use for the "The Holy Coupon Book," like everyone else at the check-outs was getting on their way out, along with a complimentary set of some kind of special underwear the

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store was promoting. I mean, I bolted.

Back in the car, I sat for a minute, shaking my head back and forth in spits and starts, probably looking like I was having the DTs, or maybe an early shimmy of Parkinson's... a muscle tremor from somewhere, or what-not. There was nothing for it except to finish the errands and return home. *I'd go online, try to make some sense of this...*

That's when the stickers on the window, on the car in the space ahead of me in the lot, registered: *Palin-McCain* one said, looking pretty faded and ragged. *Wasn't that backwards? Wasn't the* "Wasilla  
Quitta," *like*  
*we called her, the veep on that one? □ Don't they always put the veep's name last?*

Another one said, "Bachmann-Perry Overdrive!" but it was partially covered up by a Palin-Gingrich one, and an even newer one, "Romney-Santorum." There was a large one that screamed in big black letters, "You give me my country back!" And, there were some others, including a black outline of an oval-shaped fish, with the top and bottom halves making up someone's flag colors, maybe -- black and blue, with some yellow stars and stripes. Oh, and the fish had fangs. Talk about bizarre!

It was just like they always do with the elephant and donkey, you know? "Piranha Party 4-Ever!" it said on the top part, with a "4" for the "for" part, and then the small letters, "bff" on the bottom part. There was another one, too -- a real odd one. It had a wavy logo and said, "Always free checking at Church of America!" and a smaller one, with the same logo, that said, *Pa\$\$book \$oul \$aving\$ \$ea\$on!* with the dollar signs were where the letter S's usually go.

You know what else? There was a big "CGE" parking permit pasted on the window, too -- said, "Christian Government Employee," and then a long number.

That did it for me. I was out of there, more than a little weirded out. I flew over to Safeway for a few groceries and got surprised as all hell over there, too. It was now a "NeoWay" store -- and that wavy "S" logo had been replaced by a sideways and backward "S" intersecting with a lazy "Z" on the sign.

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You really had to be there to feel it -- it was like a pair of icicle hands reached right in popped my heart in ice-water. Let me tell you -- I got out of there fast, and back home, as quick as I could.

On the way back inside the house from the car, I got out my yellow "Christmart" bag from the trunk, and noticed the wording, "*Where Jesus Always Saves!*" That should have been the topper but, then I noticed the sticker on my own car. Hadn't given it even a glance that morning, before I left. Now, it seemed to stick out at me like a sore thumb...

Where I had my Obama-Biden sticker, there was now one that said, "Reid-Pelosi, 8 more years!" and "Go Get 'Em, Harry!" There was another one that said, "Forward, Nancy, Forward!" They were from something called the John Doe Party, from the looks of one sticker. It had the outline of a deer's head, and the same colors I'd seen on the fanged fish sticker. There was a lightning bolt through the "O" in Doe.

And that's all I know -- you know everything about this that I do. I don't know why we have to keep going over the beginning all the time, but you know I'm trying to play along and just follow the rules. Can you at least tell me my partner's OK? That the dogs are all right? Anything at all?

No? Well, if you're not going to do that much for me, I'm going to go back to saying this some more, and take my chances:

*Computer! Abort timeline in 3... 2... 1... abort!*

Stop giving me that funny look of yours. You won't be smiling once I remember the right security sequence! And quit saying that Romney's president -- even Americans would *never be that* stupid. Look -- I don't know what your game is, Doc, but I'm ready to stay right here -- wherever that is -- and wait you out if I have to, and we'll see who gets the last laugh!

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*Computer -- abort timeline, emergency override Whisky Whisky  
Two-Three-Nine-Omega-Priority-Tango-Alpha-One!*

*Hey! ☐ You guys get your hands off me!*

*Computer! ☐ I say again -- abort, abort, abort!*

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*P.S. ☐ The staff let me hear my favorite song twice a day, now -- but I had to promise to line up at the bell with no more problems anymore, and be good, and take all of my re-training meds first:*

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xyXCkjMBK70>

*Now, all I say is what everyone else does! ☐ I'm so much happier now, this way. ☐ Long live our new Mister Mormon President Daddy, here in the Federated States of Kolob! ☐ Mister President Romney will really, really take care of us! ☐ You wait and see!*

*\* ☐ Oh, almost forgot! I just saw my favorite commercial -- The Piranha Party Wants You to Shop Christmart Today! ☐ I love that one! ☐ And, you know what else? ☐ I heard "Twick or Tweet!" from Tweety, on the dayroom teevee, just now! ☐ Didja hear? ☐ Wow -- what a great cartoon! ☐ You know? ☐ Really, really, really great. ☐ With Sylvester! ☐ Ha! ☐ Di'n't ya think so, too? ☐ How about you, Doc? ☐ Right? ☐ Nurse Ratched? ☐ Anybody?*

- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nurse\\_Ratched](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nurse_Ratched)