

Running on Empty, Zapped & Unplugged

Written by Alex Baer

Tuesday, 21 April 2015 08:03 - Last Updated Monday, 27 April 2015 15:08

Pardon me while I smolder and sputter from somewhere within, in the penthouse of this body, up behind the eyeballs, where my subdued executive function strains and squints, scrambled sidelong a smidge.

It feels like The Really Big Bottle of Liquid Smote has been glunked out and loosed into the reluctant Jacuzzi of my brainpan, bubbled and fluffed up a tad with some stray napalm. Sorry about the greasy haze. *With any luck, that soot'll come right out of your clothes, as well as these curtains.*

The lingering blast-zone of ozone playing tag with bacon in the air ducts will probably vent out eventually. We all tend to air out eventually. The trick is to give it time, and be in no rush. That seems to be the Big Message here so far, if in fact there is one at all hanging about waiting to be discovered, recognized for what it is, then hugged, and given a lemonade and a homecoming parade.

So, today, I am cooling my fizzy, sizzled nerve endings with the oasis of my imagination: a home-made, inner-mind batch of an old family recipe, the Turquoise, Gelatin Blur and Silky Malaise of On-Purpose, Memory-Shunting Cool-Ice Bars, following a thumping, thunder-tackle of the trumpeting tsunami terror some have come to experience, and then personally call, a brain seizure.

My trip to Abby-Normal Land, or Brain Oz, or Mind-a-Palooza, was on April 9th, when a few stray lung cancer cells had a flash reunion in the Motor Function Jazz Lounge of my Control Room's brain, completely hosing normal function for a few moments of confused, mutinous body wonder while everything else on board was forced to participate in a sort of genetic kabuki theater thought possible only by Kafkaesque writers laboring to improve upon TSA scripts with rich Jungian pride, using thick, rich concepts from Samuel Beckett, The B-52s, Hamurabi, Heckle and Jeckle.

Yes: It has been a rich and heady time, me spreading my atomic structure in one-mote densities across this end of the solar system, and waiting for it all to *spring, sproing, splung*, and *splap* back into recognizable shape once again during assorted re-entry procedures at the hospital,

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where gravity and I were reunited in the same room, and allowed to playfully slap one another on the backs in a pantomime show of trust, friendship, harmlessness.

All the right signs are there, all the right noises are being made -- my body coos along again at my beck and call. The meds and staff and insurance guardians and gatekeepers, and my body and I, and a phalanx of auxiliary staff, are all on the same pages and parapets of Gregorian Medieval Prescription Chanting and Calendar Watching.

So far, so good.

My temperature is back to being taken with regular Fahrenheit gear, not the heavy-duty Kelvin stuff anymore. All of my me is in one room and time zone. I am no longer spread out into multiple hallways of the 2001 Space Odyssey Hotel. My helmet is off. There are no jets of color constantly washing swirls into both sides of my face. I am not still licking the vibrantly humming black monolith, so we are both calm -- it is no longer warbling with wrangled operatic burblings, and I am no longer a vibranaut trying to launch my essences through slip-shear in the cosmic roil and tumble of things clearly beyond my ken.

All systems are *Go*, as they say -- which, is to say, better than being all Systems *a-Go-Go*, I suspect. I imagine I will continue to hear the slow fall of the flywheel's, superdyne tone-whine for some time, as all systems continue to reshunt to their proper orientation for this planetary coordinate and era. It's pleasant enough as tones go. Nice company, really. I think of the distant music of the thing as a comfort-food souvenir, sort of -- a reminder that a major star cluster went right through me, and the stardust is now rearranging itself in new patterns and bits as we sort each other out, get to know each other a bit better, try to know what it was that happened...

I am not as rubber-minded and *stretchy-flexy* as I used to be when much younger. My slowly-compiling lack of bodily cellular inflexibility starts to get in the way, though, almost as much as my previously unsuspected mental inflexibility and stodginess. Slowly self-imposed comas are like that: You build these constructs onto yourself moment by moment, day by day, until you finally disappear in the construct -- something never in the original plan or intent. Then, it takes something major to point out the Nap Time Taken.

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Oops. ☐ Not paying attention again. (This seems to be one of the most repetitive lessons in all human history, right up there with I Swear I'm All Done With That, and I'll Never-Ever Do It Again, not In a Quint-Zillion Years.)

Myself, I blame Round One of Chemo for that initial heist of my flexibility in body and brain. Not so long ago, an extra tippie of cisplatin full-booted and field-goaled me into the borderline renal failure net, dragging the added-attraction shadow of ongoing dialysis around with me in its clanking great gym bag with chemo and radiation., and deep vein thromboses from bolo'd PIC line installations, together with assorted dehydration and rehydration challenges. That adventure would also grant me one of many stray acronyms I could hook for a laugh now and again -- *ARF*: ☐ *Acute Renal Failure*.

You look for what you need at times to get through, no matter what or how or who or how dumb the grab-holds might really be. This was easy, though: I felt like a dog, like a hang-dogged one at that, and *ARF* was not only a threat, it was a byword and a tag-I'm-it joke line. It was a handy purple Koozball to grab, squeeze, hold, release, and grab again, that *ARF*.

That *ARF* also happened to be a perfect punctuation point in a fine Frank Zappa song about *Evelyn, a Modified Dog*, from the landmark *One Size Fits All* album. The comment is attributed to her at the end of the chorus, at the end of the song. It is an arrival and a destination, that *ARF*

. It is a fact, a punctuation, and end and a beginning. Sometimes, the grab-holds one uses to get through life can seem quite busy and complex places.

As I say, nothing is ever easy or uncomplicated anymore -- and I immediately add that there is no way to ever know just what will be connected to just what else in the universe at any given time, so it is always best to try to pay some measured amount of general awareness to the universe at all times, if you can at all muster the effort to navigate that desire.

My reason for pointing this out at some length? The Universe provides explanations of a sort, but at random moments, using arcane language and obscure gestures. Some attention is required in basic catching skills, let alone in creative translation abilities. There is no tech support for these messages from the Universe: There is only you, and your best guess of what

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on earth is going on. As I have said and will continue to say: *Good luck in this endeavor.*

Meanwhile, for best results, jam as much creative clutter as you can into your mind meat and into your spirit. The Universe has a real affection for the artsy, sensory stuff in making its messages. This bodes well for us who are relieved to know that the Universe appears to not scatter its secrets into the center of a kabala of credit default swap bolsters and other agents of leveraged, lower-end, parlor-game mathematics and other dimbulb chicanery and charlatanism.

I find it a hopeful sign that the Universe appears to entrust its most refreshing secrets among branches of music, laughter, nature, thought, beauty, and rhythms. I find it an incredibly happy-making thing that there is a singularly scintillating notion at play here, that an infinity of connections and possibilities presents a diversity of opportunity and purpose for us all, with no one left out, and no spare pieces going unused or unfulfilled.

(This is my new Blue Sky, benchmark version of Universal Full Employment, should you ever hear me accidentally speak of economic theory ever again. It's possible I might fool around with such petty notions again, regarding the endlessly-maddening, merry-go-round of moneymaking-muck, but I hope to give up such feeble entertainments for richer fare, up ahead, as soon as I can shed, strengthen, reshape, and both recalculate, set, then steer new brain-sightlines and goals.)

Meanwhile, a long pause is in session, sifting and sorting. Housecleaning, really. A moving sale. Streamlining.

It is needed, and it is unscripted. Or, as it is actually much more accurate to say: I am slowly scripting it. I am still deciding which to include, what to strip out, what to punch up, what to slide in softly...

After a lifetime of failures, compounded by many lacks and absences, the impatience to get up and running, and really *zooooom* onto these issues with wildly-*glomming-and-grokking* glee, is strong beyond measure. However, I've always suspected one of my many life lessons here this time -- I

t time? next time, again? □ next time, some more?

-- is to learn Patience.

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I know this because I laugh at myself on this point all the time. I feel my own sense of impatience in constant, metronome countdown, clacking away like a machine gun or a geiger counter, and I do my Yosemite Sam cartoon voice, parodying my own itchy cosmic howl in this time and space:

- *I got no time for patience -- I gotta hurry up and relax!*

... then, I get back to business again. This may be the only way we have, any of us, to know what the Universe is actually trying to bestow or hint at or obtain or get us to interact with at any moment: The craziness that you know you must do, just not why it is you know you must do it.

As I say, there is no way to know what will be connected to which, or when or why, but I strongly suggest you try to pay as much attention as you can. Only by observing can the patterns start to emerge. And, once they start emerging, they only increase in speed and clarity, so be ready, be ready...

* * * * *

It's starting to fade a bit now, the mandatory St. Vitus Dance Lessons of Brain Lightning chasing me around the miniature temple of my skull, but my hypergraphia -- the overwhelming need to write, not a bad vice for a word-cobbler to have along in the wordsmithing portmanteau, I'd guess -- percolates on as ever, popping out pots of word-coffee like a pre-dawn assembly line.

It's always been there, in one form or another, the urge to make words lounge or skip, so it is not alarming to me now, or ever. It simply exists. I imagine it's there as a combination urge-and-itch station for my DNA: *Ask the question, speculate about answers, evaluate for next steps.*

If you've ever heard someone say, "I'm not really sure what I really think about something until I hear myself talk it over," you're either related, or you're that nice person with the interesting views who keeps showing up in the back yard wanting to talk about things again over drinks.

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Either way, the parade of words seems to make it all work fine, whether the words dance on paper or air or on the heads of crystal displays. Same-same.

Language and communication is an odd and interesting thing. On the one hand, they are lifeblood to ideas, infusing merit and pulse and passion into the dry parchment dust of sometimes-moldering what-ifs, and warrant blessings and protections aplenty from the powerful.

Other times, communications is beyond all challenge to keep tied to any rails, and the language can spontaneously create its own lethal webs and poisons, spun openly before the eyes while innocents all sleep in the sun, unmindful and relaxed.

One example I have been forced to observe being used against my own personal self, by my own unwakeful self: *Wrong, Powerful Self Talk*.

If I were to listen to my own assignments of language, I would learn that I believe other people have the power to command me to feel, and do, things I would not myself normally feel or do.

Dumb Case in Point Time. (Please note that the most important things tend to be in this exact category of Huge Knot-Headed Denseness, sponsored by a Machiavellian Rube Goldberg Society Blowout Bash.) The glide path for these comm failures range from Event to Reaction to Self Talk to Spoken Conclusion, and it all slides into place with the golden gag and guile of sleepwalking habit.

Example time:

Event: The neighbors lean on their 17-tone, diesel pickup truck horn for 93 seconds at two or three in the morning.

Reaction: This causes shock wakefulness and disliked, unneeded sleep interruption right now, when the sleep seems more important than usual.

Self Talk:

Damn neighbors are idiot morons.

Spoken Conclusion:

Neighbors are making me crazy-mad.

Deconstructing now, for a moment, and removing all cause-effect potentialities here: The neighbors have not actually forced me to do or feel anything. However, my angry, spoken account to myself -- the language I hear being used by a voice very much like my own, on the walls nears me, to the air and pillows around me -- says, in a language very much like my own, that, yes, the neighbors have forced me to feel and act. *They have forced me. I had no choice. Weapons were probably involved, torture may likely have been used, and so on.*

The humor is not lost on me as a professional communicator. (Having once been paid for writing and other allied skills when such employment was actually still plausible, a certain professional status is conferred. I have not yet been drummed out of any word-shapers guilds, so, I suppose by default....)

This is how it is that language gets a bad reputation, how it is that communications can be seen to lie down with snakes -- face down, in the cold mud, waiting for the right moment to strike.

It is clear that these tools need to be used carefully, or at least wielded with some precision and control, or all manner of hell and chaos is unleashed.

I certainly never meant to have language come to drape its own thoughts onto my mutterings and mumblings -- yet, there you can see, it clearly has taken some of my inattention and gone pole-vaulting into brand new countries for which I had no passports, no currency of the realm, and absolutely no excuses.

This is how you come to sleepwalk through life, through slow habituation -- an iota here or there, never noticed, never fine-tuned, allowed to drape and stay, building a little over time, solidifying flexible joints, burying nimble structures under massive weights.

What you may say inattentively to yourself, or casually from points of pains, can stick as something else, sharp as a pan of corkscrews ready to apply to a freshly-washed face.

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And so it was, that my ability to choose slipped slowly sideways and away, through year after year of disappointment and pain. I forgot I could choose -- who could forget such a simple thing? But, I did, I forgot. And everything that happened -- medical madness, financial madness, loss of all kinds -- kept happening, unabated, and there was really only one response: Try to move through it, while trying to keep it from destroying you.

There was no sense of victory -- just a sense of fight, and a sense of unwillingness to lose. These are enough for a few battles, but never enough to win wars. Soon, the losses in failure kept mounting, the losses from lack of wins kept adding up, and the need to hide from various failures and pains, trying in vain to recharge, grew longer each time.

Here, it is now easy to surmise that an array of diseases formed around me as a likely result of my inability to shift and refocus my spirit and energies. My message to the Universe -- consciously and not, I now see -- was one of utter simplicity: If you are not going to allow me to play, and you are not going to allow me to try, or win, then why do you insist that I stay?

I thought the only reason I might still be here was that I still had more to learn from pain, from loss, from failure, from lack of success. It takes a long period of short, sharp course corrections like that to build and reinforce into that singular message of bleakness and despair.

Luckily, I was able to receive some unscheduled, on-board, self-provided electroshock stimulation via my lucky little brain seizure, and was able to clear an old and cluttered head path toward some new exits, start taking out the trash again.

Now, I am exploring the maze of more constructive notions, slowly, with awe and a sense of real purpose and clarity, perhaps for the first time in life. I am noticing how many things I know are true -- have always been true -- and how many of them are all interconnected, and in the darndest ways.

Humbled and astonished, I am, and thrilled to be once more in control of the concept that I am able to choose, and, in making choices, I am free to decide how I feel about idiot-moron neighbors -- I am really, really, trying to change that kind of sour-apple thinking, too, just so you

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and I and everyone all know, too -- and their damn horns at three in the morning.

They don't make me do a damn thing. Never did, either. And I know that, too, again. But, still, if you slow down and listen to the language you leak as you idle around the place, draping idle thoughts here and there, without much care, you may also come to feel steered and owned by neighbors, and then by misfortune, and then by advancing age, and failing health, and missing opportunity, and challenged finances, and...

My advice, frankly, is that you practice choosing, practice making choices, and then practice reminding yourself that the choices you make build the exact world you practice to occupy.

Language can be insidious. You have to show it who's boss, and never, ever stop. Only then, can real affection take hold. It's a guess I have. I've been having a wild avalanche of them lately. They've all been spot-on. (So far, so good.)

* * * * *

When you go too far down, all the worlds you occupy collapse at once. When you get to come back up -- if you do -- the clarity is crushing, stunning, surface-of-the-sun blinding.

I occupied two worlds for half a hundred years: The place I call Surface World, where physical needs are earned and consumed, and a place I now call Life World, where all the good and valid reasons that make life worth living are pooled, nourished, and safely kept.

My failures in Surface World were epic despite valiant if not sometimes heroic efforts. Life is just like that, and sometimes for long, frustrating periods no one can explain. The failures, and the lack of successes in Surface World all but collapsed any and all activities in Life World, where fortifying strengths and resolves were sought, along with some rewards of heart.

But the Surface World required all the energy that could be generated to barely maintain any

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notion of motion, let alone halt any slide backward -- leaving nothing for Life World. Each new insult or loss or medical development or glitch spiraled the growing mass lower and lower.

It takes a very long time for such forces to bear down, reshape, and then steal you from yourself. There is no whining or call for sympathy here -- I am here to understand, not drag out violins and an empty change jar for a pity show.

I simply understand how it works, how long it takes, how it could possibly come to happen. For me, it was about a dozen years of the worst sort of luck I'd never thought I'd ever see.

PTSD? Probably. Other acronyms, too. *ARF*. So what?

I am in a good spot now, a very good place. And, I have to say I really believe it's because I went ahead and had a Seize Your Day, one with a real Sousa Marching Band in Neon Sergeant Pepper Jackets blasting away on instruments in my head while a supernova passed through the corridors up there, spewing event horizons everywhere, someone or something -- *me?* -- trying to breathe one more long breath through those old hallways, so I could back up, refocus, understand, start again...

It's good to have a sense of the map of the place, of this endeavor, at last. It's been a featureless moonscape up until now, and I have not relished that aspect of it: The blank did not provide freedom to invent, only presented an absence of motion.

Hypergraphia: One reason for restating concepts, I still find, is that there are so many ways to say the same thing -- which is really helpful, and not at all confusing. Thing is, some thoughts are stickier than others, and I never know which thought will prove stickiest for some key thoughts really worth the remembering, so the hypergraphia kicks in and tries to help me find the lightning bolt worth hanging onto, out there on the static-covered porch of blue nightcrawler sparks.

I've got an embarrassing number of sizzling lightning bolts now, already, without putting any mind or effort toward finding them -- they just show up now, where before, you couldn't get your

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hands on one for love nor money nor for all the time stored up in your soul.

Life is a strange and fascinating place.

This is the beginning of a new journey, and I have no idea what shape and applications it will all take, I can only see where the baby steps are just starting to go, and that the steps are firm and sensible, well grounded, well aimed, well placed.

It feels like dance steps from starlight underfoot, left as slipper-gifts by someone I do not know, but now trust with my feet, my music, my dance card.

If you would have told me even 10 days ago that such beliefs were aimed at my world, I would have told you there was only one belief in my world, and that such was never it.

Now, I cannot imagine having any belief in my world beyond this one of utter redemption via reawakening voyage.

I would never have thought such things as possibilities in my world. Now, in my world, there is no belief there except one -- true, real, unfolding, in progress, back on track, moving forward, unstuck in time, and very real.

I'd always wanted to live somewhere mind-blowing, and now I do.

* * * * *

The changes, the changes. There will be lots to talk about, wonder about, speculate about, as this absolutely unscheduled, serendipitous adventure unfolds. I am struck with mileposts of synchronicity, and not yet able to make sense of that feeling.

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Among first things: To grant full credence toward more focused living, and more purposeful, much more mindful living, and to shed all sleepwalking, all self-imposed comas, to stop crusting over new thinking with ancient weights, and to keep a lighter journey for a happier heart.

This, I tell you truly, and with some load of heavy surprise upon me, is dangerously close to a form of petty, empty-headed perkiness I would have formerly called out as bogus hipsterism and vapid cultural claptrap.

Thing of it is.... thing of it is: Spouting empty-headed psycho-babble without underpinnings, as a way to selfishly soar around the psychosocial cultural landscape, looking for riders and inspiration, is one thing; it is not the same thing as experiencing a major life aspect change which reorders one's life, top to bottom, and which begins a search for real meaning.

- One of many favored touchstone songs: *Don't let me be misunderstood.*
- The hope in this preferred philosophy: If you can see the motivation and understand my direction, all will be well and clear here.
- The hope is that these first steps will be seen as earnest and true, and not be seen and misunderstood as steps of any delusions or games -- there's no time or desire for less than 100% real.
- In any case, the walkabout has started -- let eyes be opened and allow the middle distances to be engaged, and all ideas and people be embraced.

And, may the stickiest ideas win -- *fans, favors, freedom.*

* * * * *

However, said the incredibly windy airbag hypergraphic with the cramped typing hands:

I really dropped by today to share an even smaller tale about hospitable, but spooky musical coincidences from the hospital teevee set. It was my first chance in a dozen years to reacquaint myself with the reality of basic cable service programming. (In my income group for quite a

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while there, drinking water was a right, not cable television packages, if that helps with some notion of backgrounding.)

I took heavy fire from Infomercial Hilltop Shellings, from Outbreaks of Political Jags and Vamps, took Commercial Assaults on Spirt left and right, but I held off all marauders coming up over the top of the breach, and I took casualties only on the music channels, on Sunday, April 12th.

For a long while there, on Sunday, hospital release day two weeks ago, there was an incredible run of tunes eliciting entire dance cards of call-and-response familiarity and comfort from a familiar and comfortable era -- my own: surprise, surprise.

I suspect only the sense of scent may function as strongly as music in evoking such clear memory. Hearing took over. Reconstructed in finest detail was the impeccable precision of music made every bit as much favorite as the original which the young jammed into their ears and souls while the terrestrial hormone storms raged in my ears, in my days, in that long ago era, just after our Moon formed and cooled.

And so mystically powered, it was dead easy to surf the hydraulic hospital bed, hanging ten, while contemplating what an unusual and unpredictable turn of events life's rich pageant can be, allowing any rusting Twister player to limber up, then limbo down to the toy box, and try to pull out a winner from the community-chest cornucopia of it all.

One tune came away especially effortlessly, sweetly, with all the original stampeding buffalo plains of bass felt in the chest the first time. This time, though, the words had switched up some...

* * * * *

STAY

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(with apologies to Jackson Browne)

- Breathing stay
- just a little bit stronger
- I wanna play, play
- just a little bit longer.
- If the Universe don't mind,
- and the doctors don't mind,
- with the nurses all so kind,
- we can keep it all in mind, and sing
- just a few more times.
- *Oh, can't I stay*
- *just a little bit longer?*
- *Please, please, please,*
- *say it's fine, just a little more time.*
- *Oh, sure -- you can stay*
- *for a little while more.*
- *Ask no promises please*
- *but you can get a little more.*
- 'Cuz the Universe won't really mind
- And the hospital won't really mind,
- So we can all share in some more time,
- keepin' everything in mind, and **DO!** [rim shot, dead stop] --
- ...what we're all here to do: *Learn more songs... just a little bit longer...*

* * * * *

... and so on through it plays and plays, still goes and goes, playing through the night, that song, somewhere, always playing...

After that run of music on the hospital teevee, coursing and morphing through my own hospital-bed lyrics, I wasn't running on empty, not anymore. I might not be empty for years and years and years to come.

- *(Anyone else hearing some beginning strands of Here Comes the Sun ?)*

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Funny thing, how easily you can become unplugged sometimes by almost anything along the way in life -- and then, how easy it is to for that very same life to plug you right back in, all over again, right from the top, never missing a beat.

Ask me, we're all here to make magic, which is music plus laughter. And, from Kurt Vonnegut's doctor son, Mark, the best-ever hunch of a guess at a reason for life I've ever heard uttered on our planet:

- ***"We're here to get each other through this thing, whatever it is."***

That one thought's going to hold me again, and for a whole lot longer time now, now that I've heard the music for it again, at long, long last.

* * * * *

A Very Brief Postscript of Passage:

Mark Vonnegut famously went a little crazy in order to find his way back a stronger, wiser soul. His journey is included in his book, *The Eden Express: A Memoir of Insanity*. His second book is also recommended, *Just Like Someone Without Mental Illness, Only More So: A Memoir*.

I have no current plans to write a book, let alone two. I am planning to play a copious --perhaps even harrowing -- amount of music from now on, however, if only to ensure a steady supply of high-mojo juju around the place. *ARF*.

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Resource Thinking-Laughter:

A few of son Mark's thoughts:

http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/15852.Mark_Vonnegut

A few of father Kurt's: <http://www.cs.uni.edu/~wallingf/personal/bokonon.html>

Resource Music:

Lyrics, Evelyn: <http://www.metrolyrics.com/evelyn-a-modified-dog-lyrics-frank-zappa.html>

Performance, Evelyn: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=agoDHke6a1U>

Performance, Stay: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aqdWNBqyxcA&list=RDaqdWNBqyxcA>

Moby Music for Contemplation, Meditation, Reflection: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ZH241gKu-s>

and: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JMKmfO0SHJg>

and: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=atyvdC15HFA>

and, from Tuba Skinny: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NUwb-Cw_tT4

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Resource comedy: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YbkVYwS2-b0>

And so on, forever. ☐ Lots out there to explore. ☐ Enjoy your search for answers, too.