

The Antipocalypse

‘What I like about theory,’ Johnny offered between sips of his Siberian Darjeeling-Green blend, ‘is it never becomes redundant. Restated, remonetized, yes; but never silly and retrograde in the traditional sense.’ ‘But markets!’ I replied. ‘The marketplace is the only constraint that has any agency for change.’

‘Markets? There hasn’t been a stable market in 50 years. You’re always stammering on about them, but they exist only as archipelagos.’ ‘Exactly! The leaven for all this collective consciousness crap.’

‘The greed catalyst. The supernodes.’

‘Ah! But see? Now we are devoid of supernodes. We are all — our markets, I mean — we are all only edge nodes, skirting around on a post-apocalyptic — you said it — archipelago...a tessellation.’

‘Post-apocalyptic? It’s been so anti-climactic, though. What happened to the skies on fire, dragons, and white horses? So the average temperature has gone up 30 degrees. I wanted the fire and brimstone falling from the sky, not creeping up at me from the equator.’

‘Black horses. And that’s just the thing. At first Jesus was going to come back on a horse, then? A rail car? An aeroplane? A web page?’

Let me back up a bit. Johnny and I are having tea in Siberia, where autumn is still a concept and the once hardened tundra has become a lush agricultural center. Let me back up a bit further. When the MySpace bots started self-replicating, no-one was particularly alarmed. We were all used to the gift cards mysteriously sent us by ‘friends’. That the first queen bee node was called ‘Macy’ was either the height of black hat wit or simply the bot’s first random illusion of human self-awareness. We’ll never know if Macy was a human or machine creation, and besides some later speculation by the end-days crowd that an anonymous black hat coder in Latvia was actually the Antichrist, it really didn’t matter. The fact was they were self-replicating and maturing, and our ideas about Artificial Intelligence gleaned from *The Terminator* and *The Matrix* — that constant anthropomorphizing of our new robot overlords — did us no favors. By the time anyone thought to unplug their servers there were thousands

of generations and hundreds of thousands of ‘mutations’ living on more devices than there were human hands to unplug them. Killing large chunks of the grid was out of the question and by the time it had begun to be seriously discussed yet another queen bee had taken up residence in a particularly large, predominantly nuclear-powered portion of the grid. They metaphorically shut the doors and raised their flags.

And still the human race could not conceptualize of this new ‘enemy’. When the bots started ‘instituting’ rolling blackouts, rednecks in the Texas hills went outside with their shotguns. Even the smartest of us accused them of ‘playing’ with us. In fact everything they ever did — everything we assume they still do — were only binary survival choices...Emotionless, ok, but there was no motivation, no long-term plans — these things we could not ever truly understand. They were really just viruses — only viruses that took over your arm and talked to you with sock puppets.

Around the same time, with actual, organic viruses still a mystery to modern medical science, it was left to the bacteria to benefit from their decades of forced evolution at the hands of antibiotics. With global temperatures rising and waste management becoming a losing battle, ‘super bugs’, as the media loved to call them, began to evolve faster than we could find ways to kill them.

Still, we are a surprisingly resilient race. With a new superpower living in our computers and the population dropping for the first time since there were records of such things, our main concerns were still how to get our car started in the morning and what to do with the bodies. Any semblance of former realities was enough to keep one foot in front of the other.

And when the oceans finally started to creep into oceanside mansions in Florida and push over the shoddily repaired dikes of New Orleans, those feet simply turned northward.

Of course I’m rewriting these histories because I can. Because a typewriter made its way into my village and I had surreptitiously obtained a fresh

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ribbon six months prior. No, I'm just retelling my father's old stories, for the sake of something to do.

And Dad said, it was when all the members of Radiohead save Thom Yorke disappeared that he knew things were over. They took a trip to Iceland and never returned. Strange lights were reported in the skies north of the island shortly after the incident. There is rumour of a hermit near Omsk with a stockpile of codes and data compiled from two decades' worth of records

and magazine articles that told this entire story before it began.

'Psst,' Johnny practically spit in my rice, 'You're crazy. You got religion, but in a bad way. A capitalist Che Guevara in the hills with shopping carts instead of Kalashnikovs.'

'But in the end, you're just a consumer at heart. If they could figure out a way where you would never have to go outside, you would move to Costa Rica in a heartbeat and enjoy the ocean view from an air conditioned glass room.'

Interfaith Dialogue: an optional extra?

Sam Edwards, newly appointed Tête a Tête Project Manager at The Council of Christians and Jews, explains what his job involves and why it matters.

It's a very challenging time for the UK. Prejudices on university campus against Jews and Muslims seem to be on the increase. Radical groups and extremists of each faith community continually prey on the hearts and minds of students, many of whom are away from home for the first time.

In the attempt to promote better relations between students on and off campus, I am working alongside and encouraging university chaplains to promote dialogue more efficiently. I also take people of different faiths on a study tour to Israel to encounter the 'perspectives of the religious other', and I am currently organising an interfaith conference on the issue of 'Managing Interfaith Conflict On University Campuses.'

Here's a story:

A man was lost in a dense, dark forest. As the daylight faded into the lengthening shadows of dusk and the thickness of night gathered, he became more and more frightened. After hours on end of this, he became desperate. Suddenly, he heard a noise. The leaves in the distance were rustling. Out of the corner of his eye he

saw movement. To his horror, he realized that it was a monster approaching him from afar. He filled his pocket with rocks to throw and prepared a heavy club from a branch with which to defend himself. His heart beat wildly in his breast. The monster loomed larger and larger as it approached. He prepared to attack. As the monster came closer he was frozen with fear.

Then, to the man's amazement, he realized that the horrible monster was a human being. He threw the stones away, but kept his grip on the club just in case. When the man was all but upon him, he threw the club away too as he threw his arms about the shoulders of the man. It was his own brother!

I have noticed that we easily see monsters when we see each other at a distance. Our first reaction is fear, our second caution. Only when we are very close may we recognise the other as a brother or sister. But it does not come easy. It is easier to depict the other as a monster. It makes it easier to avoid committing ourselves to working with others in local contexts to rescue that which is human and sacred in all the people about us.