

Cambodia

Sent: Saturday, November 02, 2002 8:04 AM

Subject: Rumours of Mortality

references, I'll hit you with a couple. first of all, this city is the most deluged with cell phones that I've ever heard. "heard" because all over the place are those absurd melodies that people choose to be their "ringy dingy". I don't think bach, beethoven or even harry mildandlow would approve of their music as a phone ringy device. I've heard everything from "what do you do with a drunken sailor" to the theme from mission impossible, to the worst of all melodies: the theme from the sting, which unfortunately has become the national anthem for all ice cream trucks (scottjoplinhad a good tune but they took it away from him). but things have gotten worse. we are now closer to being the BORG than I had realized. just saw a guy who had the full bong hookup.

for those of you not versed in star trek don't worry, as always, I provide more than adequate references to all sub references. I used to get paid by the word. thus, we have a sidetrack (sidetrek?). the borg are a bunch a badasses who patrol the galaxy in a strange cubic ship and make all efforts to assimilate others into their collective. thus, they have the wonderful catchphrase "resistance is futile." kind of like nike's "just do it," but with more attitude. point is that the borg are all tied into a central information/control system and cannot act on their own. they are a collective, just like ants or bees. back to the cell phone fanatics here. saw a guy the other day who was hooked up just like a borg. had the cell phone ear implants and mouthpiece, but was listening to the radio (station BORG). his borg communicator informed him of a message from another borg, so he switched over from central to specific, then back to central, these are dangerous times, because we have some big choices to make. second sci-fi point: turns out I have an electronic briefcase. imagine that, wasted a few hundred bucks on those outdated leather bits, since the intergalactic freeway gives me electronic ones free. haven't quite got used to it yet, so I walk around as if I'm carrying a briefcase anyways. switchover point: I'll give you some headlines here, just so you and I know where we're going, AUSSIE EMBASSY SUBSIDIZES BEER that's right, the aussis are incorrigible, and that's why we like them. in spite of the recent bali bullshit, they're still doing what they do best. was at the embassy last night at (no kidding) the embassy bar. what other country would have an open bar for expats? moreover, the prices for imported aussie beer were less than anywhere else in bangkok. there is more than one crocodile dundee.

"HOLY BULLSHIT "

my bullshitometer went right up to 10 when I heard the results of the prosecution of princess di's former butler. don't know much about the case, but apparently he was charged with stealing some stuff from her. the "crown" dropped the charges mid-trial when the "crown" prosecutor stated that the queen (the "crown") suddenly remembered last week that she had had a conversation with the butler and he had told her that he was going to store some stuff for princess di, the queen "just" remembered this last week, and told this to Charles, so he passed this on to the prosecutor. seems to me like the royal skeletons were rattling a bit too loudly in

buckingham. this was halloween, afterall,

CHINAGETS WAL MART

funny thing is that this headline needs no explanation, except that it emphasizes a bizarre mix of capitalism and communism that don't make no sense to me. in addition, there's a starbucks in the forbidden city and a mcdonalds at the great wall.

ALIEN GETS WORK VISA

may be that I get legal shortly. won't have to wear all these disguises while at work. my favorite was the guy in a business suit who looked serious. but wait, that's how I look all the time. not much of a disguise "you can fool some of the people some of the time. but sometimes you're a fool all of the time."

ELEMENTS OF DISASTER

more serious comments here, so-called terrorism looms close. I am disappointed with the "authorities" who have called the ball bomb guys terrorists, they are not. they are just murderers. there is no connection with what they did and any justifiable political motive. this is not to say that killing any innocents is justifiable. I simply say that there is a difference between gratuitous murder and death resulting from political strife. its all bad. the only difference is that people in a real political hot zones can prepare (mentally if not physically) for chaos. Israel and afghanistan, for example, are impressive places where the people are always aware of the dangers of everyday life. the Balitourists didn't have a chance.

NOODLE TAX

the stand up comics all say that the best way to get off a serious topic is to mention a noodle tax.

further, I can comment about my friend's efforts to get around the noodle tax in papua new guinea (png). working for a multinational Corp. he realized that the oppressive noodle tax in png meant that there was room for another producer. the png policy was "our noodles or no noodles." thus, he arranged for the purchase of a noodle mill in the u.s. (you've never heard of a noodle mill?). the logistics of shipping a noodle mill to png and setting it up are beyond the scope of my ability to write, but I will say that anyone who can out noodle the png government is a friend of mine. in fact, he's the guy who I'm working with here in bangkok to find \$50 million u.s. in money diverted from a petrochemical company. needless to say, we're "noodling" around

NO MORE BULLSHIT

I have a whole bunch of other stuff I'd like to share with you, but I realize that attention spans are short. I'm referring to mine, not yours. I was going to tell you about:

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corrupt Cambodian judges; how my punching bag "friend" is a movie star; child theft and murder in Cambodia; rice shortages in burma and Cambodia; insurrection in nepal as the result of a guy who calls himself a Maoist and is referred to as "the furious one"; the absence of songbirds in china's capital due to the savage Maoist policies in the 70's that meant people ate anything; banks in indonesia that were set up for just \$2 in the 90s and folded like bad debts shortly thereafter; and such unique phrases in the bangkok business world as "the creditor's took a short haircut" and "they want belt and braces security on this one,"

however, as the headline indicates, it's time to end the bullshit. hope you're all well and don't forget "everybody loves somebody sometime."

Sent:

Subject: Thunderbirds are Go

I figure a phrase from an old cartoon series is an appropriate start, since the more I see out here the more it all seems like one big funny cartoon. inthailand, for example, there are more than 12 million tourists visiting each year. thus, there's more than a few fred flintstones and george jetsons wandering around (usually wearing something like an orange animal skin with black spots) . I am currently in Phnom Penh, which is a city that's back about 20 years in time. there are few street lights (at night and at intersections), most of the roads are gravel and motorcycles are everywhere. these are little

scooters and cartoon reality strikes again with as many as 6 people on one tiny bike. now the chicken men are a whole lot stranger: one guy and one bike, but about 100 chickens dangling a meter off each side of the motorcycle (I think they're still alive, but its hard to tell, since the chicken men drive real fast). yes, it was time to sandal up once more and hit the trail. my job in bangkok is finished, at least for now, so it was time to unpack and ride out of town. I've decided that its better to think of the process as unpacking, rather than packing. that way you carry less. the patron saint of minimalists has got to be koy detmer, the now starting quarterback of thephiladelphiaeagles. apparently when on the road he only carries his play book and a toothbrush (I gather that the equipment managers for the team carry the football gear) . and beyond that, he shops for his ,football season wardrobe at target and gets it all ,(including the shoes) for under \$100. that's a minimalist. and people say that there are no lessons to be learned from sports.

awhile we're on the subject of cartoon reality there's a confession to make. I was recently guilty of the greatest of fashion crimes. not wearing purple pantaloons with a red silk shirt (too obvious), nor was I wearing a jaguar hat with matching shirt and a pinstripe suit (a, actually saw this), no indeed, my fashion crime is almost unforgivable. for one day I }wore sandals with socks. the details aren't necessary and are just mitigating circumstances for sentencing. nit used to be that it was relatively simple to tell .the difference between cartoons and reality. now I'm not so sure. with computer enhancement etc., it all seems to blend together. a more macabre cartoon played out recently in northernindia when wild elephants raided a town. apparently the pachyderms have developed a taste for the rice beer brewed in the towns. once

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drunk and disorderly the elephants "rampaged" (as elephants always seem to do) and crunched 6 people, is this any different from wiley coyote's recurring problems with acme products?

a friend recently said to me that he will soon make a t shirt that says "To obey the laws of physics." this seems to be the only way to escape cartoon reality. the people along the tonle sap river know this. they build their houses on stilts up to 5 meters high. in an unique twist of nature, the tonle sap river goes two different directions: in rainy season the mekong river rises so intensely that its tributary the tonle sap river flows back to tonle sap lake, which in turn rises some 5 meters. even the pig pens are on stilts: I wonder if the pigs feel important or just bacon. ni now have a different interpretation of the phrase "dirt poor." the folks along that river are indeed dirt poor for a good many months, since their entire region, even the towns, are either underwater or on stilts.

in cartoon land you don't have to make anything up, it all just happens anyways. on the legendary truck ride from the thailand border to the ancient city of angkor thom, the road was thick with dust. so much so that I wore (probably once again committing fashion crime) my swim goggles for most of the ride. in my defense, I state that I was the only one (of 12 people riding in the back of the truck) who could see. about twenty minutes into the ride, it got a whole lot safer, since we were all wearing dirt helmets (those with more hair being more safe than those with less). that evening shampoo was necessary. going out to the local street stand, all I found was one bottle of shampoo which for some reason was black. not reading thai or khmer, I had a shower and pondered for a minute why the shampoo in my hand was black. after the shower I noticed that the spot in my hand where I held the shampoo was black. that was fine, for a moment, until I remembered

that I had also washed my face with the stuff (it smelled like shampoo). so it is not just the dust that takes a few days to wear off you after you've finished the trip from thailand to angkor thorn. if you want to see some photos of that road in rainy season check out the website www.talesofasia.com and click into [acambodia/overland](http://acambodia.com/overland).

for now I will sign off. I am going to the museum left intact by the vietnamese when they invaded cambodia in 1979 (to remove the khmer rouge) . to the vietnamese who found the place (themselves soldiers) the former school turned into a torture center was so unimaginable, that it had to be preserved. thus, the now famous 5-21 sits as a reminder of a very dark and very recent history.

I imagine I'll send you some more soon. as always.... ~-(whatever that means)...

Sent:

Subject: To have baggage or not have baggage, that is the question.

first of all, thanks for tuning in. second of all: these are simply some random thoughts about being on the road. it is always a strange place, with great highs, medium lows, and low mediums. some showers in the morning, followed by sunny periods. other times, not. recently

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I've been debating about which is more significant 1) I don't have to get anywhere--and I don't have to get there fast. or 2) I don't have to get anywhere--and I have to get there fast.

now to the point. baggage. we've all got it. sometimes we hide it. sometimes we expose it to the world by hitting the road and earring it on our back. that's when we let others and ourselves know what it is we think we need. baggage, of course, is not only physical, its also emotional, psychological and probably a whole lot of other things we haven't yet figured out.

one thing you see while on the highways of this planet is a whole lot of people carrying baggage. some of it is green. other times blue. some go for red, while the classicists choose black. but they're all the same. it's all about need, not necessity. those of you who know me but a bit have heard the following from thomas carlyle. you can look at the way you live your life as a mathematical fraction. that is, for example, $1/2$ or $234/758947$. in the fraction $1/2$ the 1 is the numerator and the 2 is the 'denominator. you can see your life as follows: the denominator is what you think you need in life (your expectations, needs, desires etc.); the numerator (the number on top) is your actual ability to fulfil those needs. if you choose to have a large denominator (many expectations etc.) then you have to work, strive, lie cheat and steal in your attempt to find equality (balance) between the numerator and denominator. enough of that. point is that baggage is the direct symbol of denominator. the more baggage you carry, the more denominator you have. these are simple rules of the road.

thus, the goal of long-road travel is to reduce your expectations, when that happens, you have an immediate reduction in the load you carry. it's kind of a mouse-in-the-cage reaction thing. you make the right choice, you get the cheese.

why I am saying this is I've seen some people struggling with some pretty massive loads under a rather gruelling sun. and it's struck me that they work very hard to carry a lot of shit that they'll never mouse.

it's the same, I figure, with all the emotional stuff we carry with us without resolving why its there. its just along for the ride and weighing us down, dogs carry no baggage. they would if they had pockets, but they don't. sure some people (mostly in the .pacific northwest) lash on a made-for-doggie backpack to their less-than-happy hound. but I say that the dog just ends up carrying the idiot's baggage, not the dog's. they end up unhappy together. somebody said that misery love company. but nobody asked the dog for his opinion.

so I guess that its not a question of baggage or no baggage. rather, its a question of what baggage. just a short quote from a fella whose book I read recently. john ralston saul in the unconscious civilization says. "it seems to me that a sensible list of the human qualities would run as follows: common sense, creativity or imagination, ethics (not morality), intuition or instinct, memory, and reason." those are in alphabetical order and he goes on to say that they are defined in relation to one another. the goal is to create equilibrium.

what I am trying to say here is that being on the road just emphasizes something we need to do all the time: feel how heavy our baggage is. if even a jot too heavy, then its time to use common sense, imagination, ethics, instinct and reason to lighten our load. the reward for this? levity so

that's about it for the philosophical report, now aback to you john.

thanks dick. the travel report is uneventful today and has been since leaving cambodia. the last report left off with an expected visit to 5-21, the most hideous of places. its horror cannot be put into words, except to say that a children's high school was turned into a torture chamber for more than 12,000 people. on a more .optimistic note, just a short distance away there was a very similar school that was ringing with the laughter of children. I saw into about ten classrooms that were all filled with kids who had clearly worn down their teachers. in each was a teacher sitting at his or her desk watching a classroom of kids (all in uniform) frolicking, laughing and having a good time. it was late in the day and it looked like the teachers had somehow all agreed that it was time to just let the kids do what they do best. they are living and playing beyond their history.

on a last note in the travel report, I'm now on an island called ko chang, which is in thailand near the cambodia border. I'm staying in a little wood hut sandwiched between an emerald green jungle and an crystal blue sea. nobody said that reducing the denominator was a bad thing. inevitably, more soon,