



**Clown
Apocalypse**
and Other Calamities

Mark A. Rayner

The Clown Apocalypse & Other Calamities

By Mark A. Rayner

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The Clown Apocalypse

1. The Esclowna Outbreak

You are old enough now to know the truth. So today in juggling class, we will learn about what many call the “Clown Apocalypse.”

Years after the disaster, we survivors discovered the Bozo Virus (BV) got its start at Escola de Clown de Girona, near the end of semester.

The “Esclowna” was a kind of university/prep school for the international clowning set. The buffoons-in-training lived in common dorm rooms, and shared everything, so the virus spread easily within the school. There it incubated. (The school was at least thirty kilometers from the nearest village in Spain.)

They developed flu-like symptoms, and then recovered, but of course, everyone at the school was a clown (or a clown-in-training) already. So the worst of the symptoms went unnoticed, until after they matriculated. When the school year was over, the faculty, staff and students went to their respective home countries, throughout the world, and began to perform as clowns: at birthday parties, in old folks’ homes, in circuses, at rodeos, and on the street.

At first the virus was spread by contact. Then it mutated and became airborne. By the time authorities realized they had a pandemic on their hands, the virus had mutated again: you could catch it by even seeing a clown. By then it was too late. Only the most extreme coulrophobes – people with a pathological fear of clowns – and the naturally immune were spared the ravages of the disease: first flu-like, then the outbreaks of Red Nose, Sad Face, Happy Face, and of course, the grotesque, frizzy, multi-colored Goofy Hair.

The economy ground to a halt because of employee absence as the victims of the Bozo Virus spent their days making balloon animals, pulling down one another’s pants, and stuffing too many of themselves into small vehicles. (Many of these victims suffocated instead of suffering the fate of the rest.)

The infection rate was ninety-six percent, and except for a few cases where it was possible to restrain the victim, lethal. The Bozo Virus was a cruel task-master. The infected could think of nothing else but clowning. Every moment they were conscious, they spent coming up with routines, acts, and “bits”. They didn’t eat. They didn’t drink. They only slept when their bodies ran out of energy. Eventually, they succumbed to the disease, and no amount of horn honking could rouse them.

The survivors all agreed it was a tragedy. Hilarious, but a tragedy.

2. When the Laughter Died

It was as though everyone who was infected by the Bozo Virus (BV) had received an extensive education at the Barnum and Bailey Clown College. In fact, one of the early ways of detecting the infection was for doctors to test if patients could juggle, even just a little bit.

It was a sign of the hilarious malady to come.

In addition to physical skills, victims of BV had a gnosis of clowning techniques. For example, after the onset of the physical symptoms, sufferers would understand the idea of having a framework, a general structure for an act, whether a short “side dish” or a longer “entrée.” These would be fleshed out (and covered with whiteface) with bits, gags (running and stand-alone), and occasionally, with some business. Sometimes with props, sometimes with other clowns.

For some, the disease was relentless. As soon as they had a framework – and another victim or prop to work with– and even some weak business, they would start the show. It didn't matter if they had an audience or not. It didn't matter if they were any good. They just needed to clown.

But the laughter that clowns and virus victims alike long to hear would never come. The blow-off arrived, but there would be silence. Many a joke “chomped the horn,” and produced nary a chuckle.

These poor bastards did not have to wait for the inevitable end of the Bozo Virus. The end would find them sooner. As their gags died, so did they. In horrible, horrible droves.

Some lay on railroad tracks, some took pills, and a lucky few found cannons to fire themselves from. Most of them would just pretend they tripped on something, and fall into traffic. (This was dreadful on two fronts: in addition to the guilt of thinking they'd just killed someone, drivers discovered how impossible it was to get pancake makeup off of their fenders.)

Everyone agreed: even clowns couldn't make suicide funny.

3. Moments of Hilarity

There were moments, early on in the pandemic, that were actually quite funny.

One day your child could barely run around the yard without tripping, and then the next moment she would suddenly be able to juggle. Balls, pails, puppies, all flying through her hands while she kept up some patter way beyond her years — it was hysterical!

Then the white face might start the next morning. It would be worrying, especially the red, frizzy hair. But she seemed happy. Perhaps *too* happy.

Sometimes, the Bozo Virus would work itself into the neocortex, firing along the pathways that govern aggression.

And then, while she was juggling knives, those moments of hilarity would turn into pure terror.

4. Beach Happies

Of course, many people had been going about their day-to-day business when they were afflicted by the Bozo Virus.

Some were at work, some at home, but some had been on holiday when the plague struck. They showed all the same symptoms of the other victims: the outbreaks of Red Nose, Sad Face, Happy Face, and of course, the grotesque, frizzy, multi-colored Goofy Hair.

But there was something about the calming and joyous effect of being at the beach that changed the disease, in ways that were subtle and almost impossible to see. These victims were just as determined to do their clowning. They may have not had access to balloons to make balloon animals, or bowling pins for their juggling, but they made do with shells and rocks and rotting fish, which, when stuffed down someone's pants, is actually pretty funny. (Unless you're the stuffer.)

The ocean itself became a prop for their bits. (Some of these sufferers drowned, as the Bozo Virus attacked the parts of the brain controlled muscle memory, thus destroying their ability to swim while increasing their capacity for pratfalls, acrobatics and the aforementioned juggling.)

The media called the calming effect a “beach happy,” and it was almost a joy to see.

Unless you happened to be on a nudist beach.

5. The European Atrocity

It became clear after the initial chaos that some people had a natural immunity to the Bozo Virus. The vast majority of humans were infected, but some were unaffected by the clownish behaviors and grotesque physical changes caused by the disease.

Individuals who were *already* clowns, for example, escaped the relentless bug that caused its victims to literally clown themselves to death. And many of these fine folk actually helped civilization survive. Some of these people were part-time clowns, and they had a variety of day jobs. (No doubt, jobs where they dreamed of all the setups and bits and “blow-offs” they would perform on the weekends at birthday parties and so on.)

In France, however, this had unfortunate effects, for there, the most common kind of clown is the mime. Abhorred by many audiences, mime is in fact one of the core set of skills used by many clowns, and so, experienced mimes were immune to the virus.

But the problem, in France anyway, was distinguishing the “real” mimes from the victims of the Bozo Virus, which had mutated, and made all of its victims turn into mimes. Freed from the approbation of their audience, these faux-clowns organized the sick into vast armies of silent, creepy, beret-wearing mummers; they invaded neighbouring countries.

Belgium fell first. Then Luxembourg. Then the Netherlands. The Alps and the Pyrenees provided natural barriers to Italy and Spain respectively, but the Rhine was not enough to contain them and these hordes of French mimes rope-pulled themselves into Germany.

In Germany, the virus had already mutated, and the bozo-afflicted there had already turned into something called über-clowns. Mostly this just meant the clowns liked to wear pickelhaube over their outbreaks of Frizzy Hair. But the mime-mutation was stronger than über-clown, and soon, there were German mimes too.

In Britain, where the mime is most hated, the few remaining civil and military authorities realized they were going to be next. Already, the legion of mimes who had taken over the Low Countries and Germany were already gathering on the English Channel, pretending to pull the British Isles closer to them with a rope. It was only a matter of time until they pulled themselves close enough to the Chunnel.

Feeling they had little choice — England was already overrun with Morris Dancers (another variation of the Bozo Virus) — they collapsed the tunnel. Just to be on the safe side, they launched a few tactical nukes around the French terminus of the Chunnel.

Warned that the missiles had been launched, the mimes had pantomimed that they were trapped in glass boxes. This could not protect them from nuclear fission, no matter how convincing their show.

It did atomize and cause a new, more horrible mutation, dubbed by the CDC as “Jerry Lewis-itis.”

6. Buffoonibilism

So a jolly fat clown isn't terrifying, is it? He looks kinda fun, right? Sure, up until the point he starts to eat your face.

One of the mutations of the Bozo Virus that was most horrifying was the one that caused

buffoonibilism, a combination of intense clowning and an alarming desire to eat human flesh. This mutation seemed to be limited to North America, primarily in hill country in the United States, but there were some instances of it in Alberta, Canada as well.

The few remaining survivors the Clown Apocalypse report that these incidents would seem somewhat innocent and fun at the start, and then get really horrible, really fast.

First the *buffoonibals* would be joking around with the other victims of the plague, doing pratfalls, stuffing themselves into small cars, and then you would hear The Laugh.

The Laugh, as all survivors of the Clown Apocalypse remember, is the sound victims of the disease made as they experienced either physical or emotional agony. Those infected by the Bozo Virus were unable to cry in pain, or scream, or make any other sounds except for high-pitched, insane laughter.

And they made it a lot when a *buffoonibals* started gnawing on them.

7. The Sexy Cataclysm

The Clown Apocalypse was not universally grim, unless you had a debilitating fear of clowns.

Apart from the moments of hilarity you'd sometimes get when you saw someone who was previously uncoordinated juggling while riding a unicycle, or the amusement of watching a dozen police officers in white-face try to stuff themselves into a Volkswagen Beetle, there was a significant bright side to the pandemic.

While most were affected by the Bozo Virus in standard ways — the orange frizzy hair, slappingly large big feet, and the standard white face — some had only a hint of clownishness in their appearance.

The disease still forced its victims to clown themselves to death, but this required a certain self-confidence and uninhibited playfulness. (Scientists now know this is because the virus attacked the parts of the brain that allows us to control our behavior.) A certain segment of the population became very sexy clowns, in both dress and in their routines.

If not for the near-collapse of civilization, a new porn industry would have tried to exploit this off-shoot of the virus, but, alas, we only have news footage and a few first-hand reports from survivors of the virus.

And for all the coulrophobic masochists unaffected by the virus, it was a bozo-nanza.

8. The Clownsickle

One of the worst things about the clown apocalypse was just sorting out the sick from the opportunistic psycho-killers, who used the disaster to cover their own heinous activities.

Many victims of these clown psychos, or *clownsickles*, as they are now known in the official history of the Clown Apocalypse, the Tome of Whiteface, were first responders: EMTs, cops and, of course, the Carny Corps.

In case you've lost your copy of the Tome of Whiteface, The Carny Corps were a secret organization that had been preparing for the Clown Apocalypse since the times of Ancient Rome. (Of course, they used to be called the *custodes de stercore*, or keepers of the dung, in those days.) Since the times of the Circus Maximus, long had it been prophesied by the keepers that there would come a time when the buffoons would run amok, and whiteface would cover the world. Only the ancient order of the *custodes de stercore* would be able to stop them.

Alas, none of their carny mind tricks were a match for a psycho-killer with a chainsaw, and the Carny Corps were devastated in the early time of the apocalypse. Who knows what horrors might have been avoided if we'd had their ancient dung-wisdom to help us?

Tragic as these early deaths were, there was poetic justice, as most of these *clownsickles* would succumb to the bozo virus themselves and usually clowned themselves to death in gruesome and horrible ways. (Chainsaw juggling was by far the most common.)

9. Clownnui

Many of the survivors of the Clown Apocalypse report that during their illness they felt a deep, soul-numbing ennui, even as they had the overwhelming urge to do slapstick and other business. The sense of existential tedium they experienced, even while they were riding tiny tri-cycles while several other BV sufferers were perched on their backs, was quite common.

This effect is one of the most astonishing parts of the Clown Apocalypse. How could one be bored while juggling chainsaws? Such was the insidious nature of the Bozo Virus, as reported by Jeremy Heidegger, one of the survivors of the pandemic:

“So there I was, balanced on top of a unicycle, juggling a live chainsaw, a clown horn, and two dachshunds. My belly was empty and I was actually dying of thirst. The only reason I survived was because my wife had found a seltzer bottle somewhere and spent the first week of the outbreak spritzing me in the face with it, thus giving me a chance to rehydrate. I was conscious of my actions, though I could not control them. I was terrified, but, at the same time, I was struck by the hilarious futility of life. Its basic meaninglessness. The chainsaw ran out of gas, moments before I dropped it on my foot, and this struck me not as lucky, or charmed, but as tedious. Life itself was a series of boring events that I felt alienated from.

“Yet I just kept laughing.”

10. Immunities

As we all know now, clowns in all their guises – be it rodeo clowns, circus clowns, mimes, mummers, *commedia delle arte* players, and even medical professionals in the clown care community – were immune. But who else? Of that four percent, what protected them?

Coulrophobes, ironically, were immune. Scientists are still unsure why this would be, but the current hypothesis is that the minds of these poor souls were so averse to all things to do with clowns, their bodies produced an unnatural immunity. Of course, this only applied to bona fide coulrophobes who had a pathological fear of clowns. For those who just thought clowns were “creepy” or, even worse, the jaded misanthropes who liked to make fun of clowns, the infection rate was just as high.

There were the skill-based immunities. Jugglers escaped the virus, almost to a person. As did acrobats. People with funny walks seemed inure to the virus. But what of comedians? Did they escape?

It may come as a surprise that stand-up comedians were the hardest hit. The virus seemed to know when humor stemmed from pathos and self-importance, not genuine playfulness. Many who did improv comedy, though not the ones who dabbled in stand-up too, were spared. The Bozo Virus was relentless.

Some actors survived as well, notable examples being: Nicolas Cage, David Caruso, Jim Carrey and Jack Nicholson, who are with us still. (Though in the case of the latter, it's unclear if that's because he once played The Joker.)

Other professions? Some university instructors seemed to have big enough personalities, or funny walks, or a reliably odd choice of clothing that gave them immunity. And there were some outliers in the writing, digital and visual arts communities, particularly those who were “performance” artists.

And politicians? Surely they were clowns to begin with? No, no, they all died.

Some argue that is the only good thing to come of the Clown Apocalypse.

11. The Day the Clowns Died

There is no doubting the Bozo Virus is the worst pandemic on record. The human population dropped from more than seven billion to just over 280 million. They were scattered across the world. Many were traumatized beyond rehabilitation. (To this day there are coulrophobes who refuse to leave their basements.)

It was a wounded world that limped on, in their funny walks. When you've watched your loved ones die of hunger while they planted banana cream pies in one another's faces, it's hard to stay calm. Certainly, it was impressive to watch all twenty of your classmates stuff themselves into a Cooper Mini but gruesome to watch them laugh while their limbs dislocated. Horrific to find oneself giggling while they suffocated to death.

All clowns survived. They were a small percentage of the pre-plague population, less than a fifth of a percent, but afterwards, they were five percent of the population. They were everywhere, in their damned motley. Proudly wearing whiteface. Their red noses and frizzy hair were a constant reminder of the horrors everyone had experienced in the worst days of the pandemic. And so, the survivors turned on them.

The clowns fought back, but their numbers were too few. It is said that some mimes escaped, and have a secure based somewhere in the Pyrenees, but these are just rumors.

Eventually, order was restored, and the survivors experienced regret. All across the world, statues of clowns were erected to the fallen, both natural- and virus-touched clowns. As we learned what caused the virus, and how some had immunity, humanity tried to reconcile how our buffoon butchery had destroyed what was possibly our best defense against another outbreak.

But we did the best we could. And that, my dear students, is why you have to learn to juggle.

Other Calamities

The Dream of Flight

It seemed impossible, but it was happening. Glen was flying!

After he tied the geese to himself, they had flown higher and higher, above the clouds, so he could now take in the glorious early morning sunlight — Glen guessed about eight or nine-thousand feet. It was spectacular. He whooped and hollered with delight. The geese honked back at him. Glen thought he may have been projecting his own elation onto the geese, but it seemed like they were actually excited about their feat too. It was an achievement for both species!

But more than anything, Glen was filled with pure joy. He'd never felt more alive, at one with the immensity and power of the universe. He laughed aloud, over the sound of the geese beating their powerful wings, louder than the rush of wind in his ears.

Then the 747 hit him.

A Romance for the Ages

It began simply.

He was out on his morning rampage when he crashed through the front gates of SeaWorld.

She was doing the 10 AM show, trying to keep her spirits up while simultaneously pleasing her human masters and keeping the male dolphins from gang raping her.

It was love at first sight; she was drawn to his chiseled good looks and stylish shoes, and he instinctively knew that she would not like fire.

As the crowd fled in abject terror, she knew he would free her from this horrific prison. She jumped into his arms as he approached the tank, and he smiled as he felt the coolness of her scales on his hands, the warmth of her hand on his face.

It all went so well until lunch.



Miss Atomic Test, Las Vegas

Like everyone, she was in shock.

But she had just narrowly avoided the disintegration of LA. She'd moved to Vegas the week before the war began, to work as a background dancer.

They found her the day after, in Vegas, getting ready for the show. She was starving as usual. Her figure just wouldn't conform to the standards of the 2020s, and that meant not eating very much. Not that she felt like eating, after she'd seen some of the video of what remained of her hometown.

They could change it all with a photo, they told her.

All they needed was for her to accept that she could be in two times in one place. It was a little thing, right? Like, you're a gorgeous dancer who thinks she's fat. The reality doesn't change, just because your thinking is all wrong.

So she said yes, and the next day — after all the injections, and the strange machine — she woke up in 1954. She was a dancer at the Copa Room, at the Sands. She did a show with Frank Sinatra. Sammy Davis, Jr. dropped in, and was a big hit. Everyone thought she was gorgeous, even though (she thought) she was a fat cow.



Eventually, she got comfortable with being desired by so many men, despite her obvious (to her) defects. She loosened up, though she was always quiet and reserved. Some of the other girls called her “the librarian” but if they’d had the right words, they would have called her *the cipher*. She never mentioned her folks — she was intensely aware of the fact that they were not born yet, and she didn’t want to say anything to prevent their existence.

They hadn’t told her which photograph would be the right one. Funny that the scientists should miss such an obvious detail, so she treated each snap with reverence and joy. “The secret,” the lead scientist had told her before she left the year 2024, “is your innocence and exuberance. When they take the shot, you have to exhibit that, above all.”

It was one of the things that made her more of a cipher than a librarian. Her reserve dissolved whenever a camera was produced, which was noticed by a Hollywood producer in 1956. He wanted to her to do a screen test in LA, but she turned him down flat.

They hadn’t said which photo would be the one, but the scientists hadn’t told her she needed to do movies.

When it happened a year later, she was in no doubt. The photo that would save the world had been taken.

And after that, she was free.

After the Clown Apocalypse

Like all pandemics, the Bozo Virus ran its course.

For those of us who were immune, we had to watch society go mad with clowning. Some saw the horrors of chainsaw juggling. Others experienced the exquisite madness of *buffoonibilism*. We were there to witness the collapse of a global economy, the end of civilization as we knew it. We were not the only survivors, though.

Some of the afflicted were not as driven by the need to do bits, gags and business. Unlike most of the victims, who either starved to death or who could not stand the dearth of applause, some survived the flatness of their frameworks. They lived, and so, passed on their virus-learned tricks and trade.

Geneticists have yet to determine what this will mean for the trajectory of the human species.

What we do know is this: sales of unicycles are at an all-time high.

An Open Letter to John Hodgman, Minor Celebrity

I would normally never bother a minor celebrity, but I have a warning to pass along.

It may save your life.

Last night I had a rather disturbing dream. It felt prophetic, though I hope it was not. In this dream, the America we both know and love had been replaced by an atomic wasteland, yet, civilization survived in some forms.

For instance, you were still plying your trade as a judge. Post-atomic America was in desperate

need of judges (and entertainment), so you were working your way around the country, helping bring justice back to the glowing embers of the Homeland, and, where appropriate, reading from one of your works of All World Knowledge.

I ran into you in this milieu. What was I doing there? I am not a judge, nor a minor celebrity, but I too had found a place in this new and terrifying world. My adventures in post-apocalyptic America began as a hiking trip with my brother, but I discovered that I had hidden talents as a “frontier doctor”. (I was especially good with irradiated ant bites.)

We crossed paths at the Best Western, where my brother and I were waiting in line to get a room. We had just escaped a nest of cannibalistic humanoid underground dwellers (CHUDs). I had been treating them for rickets (there’s just not enough vitamin C in human tissue), and, once the therapy was done, they had decided we could be eaten. (Sprinkled with crushed chewable Flintstone vitamins, as I had suggested.) Lesson learned.

So there we were, waiting in line, and I noticed you, farther back in the line. I thought, “They’re making John Hodgman stand in a line? That’s not right.” I suggested that you and your companion take our spot in the queue. (My brother was not pleased by this suggestion. He desperately needed a shower, having spent some time in the CHUDs’ stewing pot, ‘marinating’.)

I should note what you were wearing, because I found it both strange and charming. I’m not sure what you were up to when the bombs fell, but my guess is some kind of convention where you had been cajoled into COSPLAY. Perhaps you had been doing a skit. In any event, you were dressed as Han Solo. A look you managed to bring off. You had sensibly replaced your fake blaster with a .45 automatic. Your companion was not decked out as Chewbacca, though he was quite hirsute. I do believe it may have been Paul F. Tompkins, though I still don’t understand how his normally dapper appearance could have become so shaggy in just a few years of post-apocalyptic living. He did have a bandoleer, but, instead of shells, it was loaded with artisanal sharpened pencils. They looked both beautiful and deadly.

When you got to the front of the line, they only had one room left, with only a single bed. Worse yet, there was no parking spot available for your Winnebago/Traveling Hall of Justice. I remarked, once again, on how it was strange that parking was at such a premium in post-apocalyptic America, what with the preponderance of vaporized buildings and empty stretches of desolate landscape. My brother sighed heavily as I said this — clearly this was a subject that I’d exhausted with him. You, however, agreed wholeheartedly and we had an impromptu seminar about the political-economic underpinnings of the situation. My brother and Hairy Paul F. Tompkins gave each other knowing looks, and rolled their eyes.

Thus, a firm friendship was formed, and you suggested that if my brother was amenable to riding on the roof of the Winnebago/Traveling Hall of Justice — don’t forget he was still covered in CHUD marinade and therefore somewhat odiferous — you could give us a ride to another Best Western across town, where surely, there would be room for all of us, and the Winnebago too.

Happily we went out to your vehicle. You thought that a tour of the Hall of Justice was in order, and opened the unlocked door. Inside, a giant mutated ferret awaited.

I thought, at first, it was some kind of pet. Then it grabbed you by the neck, severing your jugular, and I knew, no: NOT a pet.

The hairy Paul F. Tompkins threw a perfectly sharpened pencil through one of its red glowing eyes, and I tried to save your life. Alas, this was not a wound where liberal application of duct tape and whiskey was a helpful treatment.

And at this point, I awoke, perturbed. Saddened. Cursing myself for my own (imagined) medical ineptitude, and I knew that I had to write to you. To warn you. If you’re going to tool around in the post-apocalyptic wasteland in a Winnebago — and I’m not saying you shouldn’t, though it wouldn’t be my choice — ALWAYS lock the door.

Good luck and best wishes,

P.S. I do realize this is a ridiculous worry, because, as we all know, the world will drown, not burn, as predicted by Ragnarök.

The Curious Case of Toulouse Le Grandfig, Graphic Designer

PATIENT HISTORY OF GRANFIG, TOULOUSE LE
File #: 12-23571-X
Dr. Abe Cornelius
Bellevue Hospital — Psychiatric Triage Center

Entry 1: Dictated: April 25, 1951

The patient was brought into the hospital by several co-workers, including his immediate supervisor at Vandelay, Alderson, Pentergrast, Ilterton and Deckard, a mid-sized advertising company on Madison Avenue.

The Creative Director, Mr. Hillary Scott, introduced Mr. Grandfig to me, and said he was not only a renowned Dadaist, but that Grandfig had been working at his firm since late 1949 as a graphic artist.

It is worth examining Mr. Grandfig's work history to get a sense of the progress of his current disorder. [See Figure 1]

When Grandfig began working at Vandelay, Alderson, Pentergrast, Ilterton and Deckard (VAPID), he claimed to have arrived in New York from "distant lands" and needed to earn some money. He began working on the Petri account, which needed an "offbeat" touch. According to Mr. Scott, "Toulouse had a great feel for the material, and the odd touches tickled the fancy of our client."



Figure 1

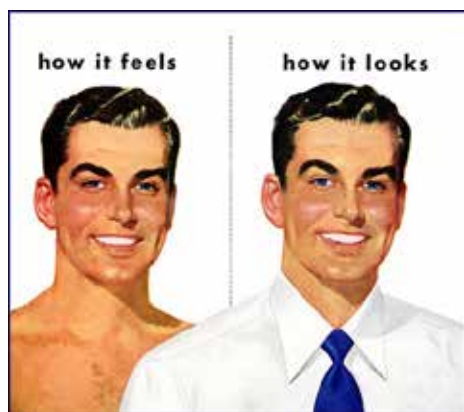


Figure 2

Next Grandfig was put to work on the Arrow Shirts campaign [See Figure 2], which was not as successful. Though he did not actually write the copy on this ad, Mr. Grandfig did inspire it with his artwork.

According to Mr. Scott: "This ad was trying to show how free you feel wearing Arrow Shirts, but, frankly, it just screams to me of repressed homosexuality. That's probably why our client liked it so much."

Side note for later: examine possibilities of paper exploring how psychiatric terms have entered common parlance to the denigration of our profession.

Mr. Scott added: "The Petri campaign was quite successful, though, frankly, all those rodents wearing cowboy boots were kind of disturbing."



Figure 3



Figure 4

From there he was put on the Jantzen account [Figure 3] for which Grandfig painted a number of lovely women sporting Jantzen's clingy (and to this psychiatrist's mind) deviant bathing wear. This went well up until sometime late in January, when Mr. Grandfig replaced the copy on the ad with his own.

What other survivors is he writing of? Survivors of the war? Are these troubling images the result of some kind of trauma suffered under the Nazis? I must explore this issue in depth.

After this gaffe, Grandfig was not given any more lettering work. Left with no actual language, Grandfig clearly subsumed his rage and paranoia into his actual artwork. One glance at these paintings for the Van Camp Corporation will reveal the sinister and depraved undercurrent to his thoughts. [Figure 4.]

None as alarming as this actual artwork, which Mr. Scott mimeographed for my records. [Figure 5.]

Notice the label. Instead of saying "Van Camp's Pork and Beans", it clearly reads "Van Camp's Long-Pork and Beans." Luckily, Mr. Scott caught this artwork before it went into production.

"Actually, I was torn on whether to stop it or not," Mr. Scott told me in our interview.

"Really?" I asked.

"Yes, I thought it would be amusing to see what would happen. To see if anyone caught the reference."

"But you decided against that?"



Figure 5



Figure 6

"Yes, but I have the original hanging in my office. It's quite brilliant."

Putting Mr. Scott's artistic proclivities to the side for the moment, it must be pointed out that long-pork is a reference to cannibalism. Has Grandfig been a participant or witness to such a morally proscribed event? Perhaps the other "survivors" he spoke of have done such a thing. I have heard it was difficult in Europe after the war, but I had no idea it was so serious. Perhaps it only happened in Belgium.

Next, he was caught sneaking into the lettering room to change the text on this advert for some grocery firm. [Figure 6.]

According to Mr. Scott, the issue was brought to a head when this advert for a Chase & Sanborn product went to press, was put on the product, and very nearly went to market. [Figure 7.]

Mr. Scott felt it was safest to bring Grandfig to the hospital for his own safety as well as that of his firm, VAPID.



Figure 7

According to Scott: "I'm pretty sure the copy writers were going to kill him if he changed any more of their work."

Entry 2: Dictated: April 26, 1951

For our first session, I thought I would try to understand Grandfig's psychosis through the medium of his art. I brought in the artwork he had been working on for a hat-maker, and had him role-play what the characters were saying to one another. [Figure 8.]

[Recording begins]

Dr. Cornelius: So what are the men in this first panel saying to one another Mr. Grandfig?

Grandfig's voice: Hey Bob, how are things going with the new job?

Great Jim, I've just been assigned to CEO cleanup in sector 6.

Really, how's that going?

Not well. They keep eating everyone. But at least I have this hat. Of course, it would be nice if it had a laser defense net too!

Dr. Cornelius: What is a laser defense net?

Grandfig: Something to keep the CEOs at bay. Long enough to find a baby or something to throw at them anyway.

Dr. Cornelius: What?

Grandfig: Should I do the next one?

Dr. Cornelius: Uh, I haven't fully absorbed the first, but yes, let's.

Grandfig: "Hey Steve, how's that hat feeling? Is the laser defense net uncomfortable?"

"Mrfpp, mdhgtr, pank mawlk ... mipe."

"Yeah, I had a cerebral embolism once too."

Dr. Cornelius: So you think the man with the pipe had a cerebral embolism?

Grandfig: Of course not. Jones is an idiot.

[sound of heavy sigh]

Dr. Cornelius: How about this last one?

Grandfig: Oh, they're in love.

[recording stops]

Apparently, Mr. Scott's amateur diagnosis is correct. Clearly, there are repressed issues afoot, so



Figure 8



Figure 9

for our next session, I asked Grandfig to create a painting of his family, and he produced [Figure 9.]

I administered 150 mg of thiorazine immediately.

When Grandfig had calmed, I asked him why he was so obsessed with anthropophagy. Had he eaten people?

He was groggy, but he answered. "Not in this timeline, Doctor. And in the Land of the Future, all I ever ate was one foot. One foot! You can't be a cannibal if you eat one foot. Especially if you didn't know it was a foot. You know I don't mind telling you, I wish I'd never had my tail removed, then none of this would ever have happened."

Entry 3: Dictated: April 27, 1951

When I dropped by Grandfig's secured room to see how his night went, I was surprised to see that he was gone. All that was left was a postcard and a small can of food. [Figure 10.]

I ripped the label off the food, for this record. [Figure 11.]

The content of the postcard is clearly indicative of some kind of deep paranoia, probably brought about by eating a foot and/or being abused by homosexual Nazis. I must say, I was worried about the veiled threat that I would see Grandfig "in the future." The food was clearly mislabeled, as it turned out to be some kind of potted meat.

It was, however, delicious.

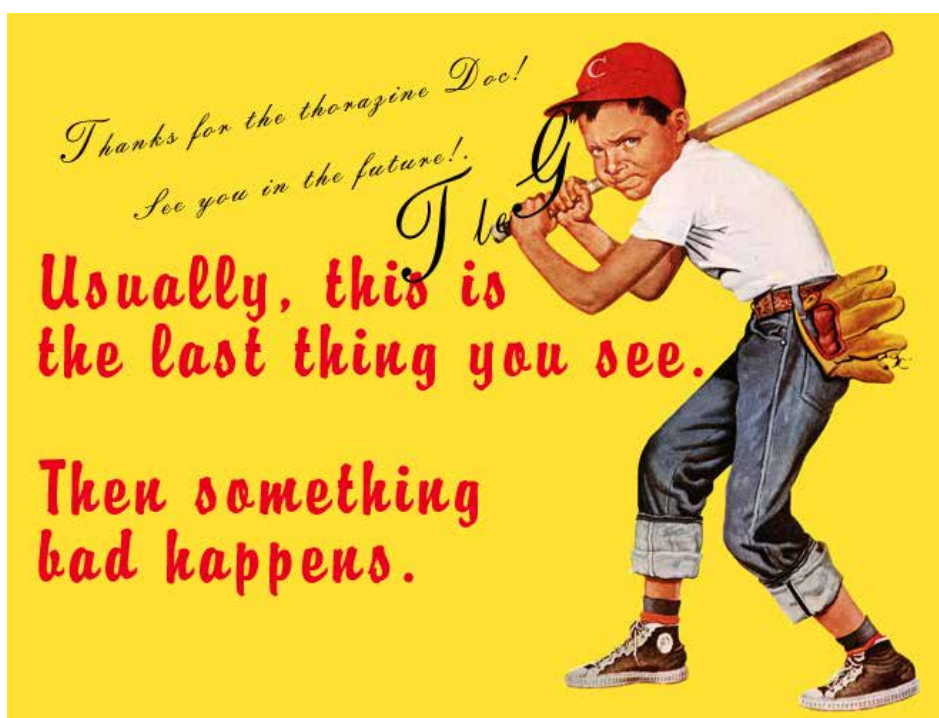


Figure 10

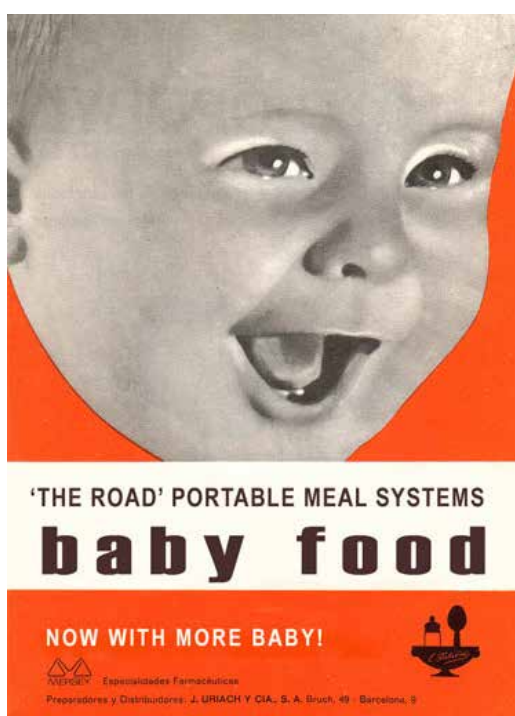


Figure 11

Early Outbreaks of the Bozo Virus

Following the cataclysm of the Clown Apocalypse, researchers discovered there had been similar plagues throughout the ages. One of the worst outbreaks in history was the Great Buffoon Drive of '47.

Many thought it started with an especially bad outbreak of the Laughing Flux – a terrible disease causing its victims to fart themselves to death. (Terrible, but hilarious.) Others are sure it was because of this clown: Josepheus the Jolly, aka JJ the Juggler, aka J-Bone the Frisky Who Brought Night Terrors and Incredibly Inappropriate Footwear.

He ate a lot of people on his way over the continental divide. But more of them he just nibbled on, spreading a proto-Bozo Virus that was not as virulent as the one humanity barely survived in the 21st century.

Whatever the confluence of events, thousands of clowns made their way west in 1847, and so, the great state of California was born.



A Humorous Vintage Photograph

After this photo was taken, an alien zygote burst from this child's chest at a tremendous velocity.

It blasted through the watermelon slice a fraction of a second later, and then ran down the street, presumably leading to the "mysterious" deaths in the neighborhood later that summer. The photographer experienced years of insomnia, heavy drinking, and eventually, suicide.

Now you feel bad for laughing, don't you?



Acknowledgements

Thanks, as usual, to all my friends and family who have helped me put this together, and to all my fans who have kibitzed on my short work over the years. A special hat tip to Ronny and Sharon for helping to proof this work. All the mistakes are mine, not theirs!

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