

Defending Nero

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I find it remarkable that the human species still exists. Even more remarkable than Leonard Cohen getting the Male Vocalist of the Year Award.

Consider this. A worker accidentally drops a wrench socket down a silo – it hits a missile causing an explosion that catapults a nine megaton hydrogen bomb into a field several hundred yards away. (Oops.) Because of naval mishaps, there are now nine nuclear reactors on the ocean floor and fifty nuclear warheads. (Mishaps.) A nuclear bomb falls out of a U.S. bomber and lands in a Carolina swamp – it hasn't been found yet. (Perhaps the localized proliferation of two-headed alligators should be considered a clue.) The U.S. drops four plutonium bombs on Spain by mistake. (I have to ask – four at once or on four separate occasions?) Plumbers at DuPont mistakenly connect an employee drinking water fountain to a well that is contaminated with trichloroethylene, a highly toxic carcinogenic solvent. (plumbers.)

And these are just accidents. We can do much better when we try. Radioactive iodine was deliberately and secretly released from the Hanford nuclear bomb site in the 1950s. Operators at the Rocky Flats plutonium plant intentionally dumped toxic chemicals into a creek; at the Fernald plant, it was 167,000 pounds of uranium by-products. The Manville Corporation hid from its employees information about the dangers of working with asbestos, causing the death of 240,000 people. James Charles Thornton, a man who knowingly has AIDS, donated blood; he was charged and convicted with committing “a common nuisance.” James Floyd, a former Supervisor of Operations at Three-Mile Island, was convicted of cheating on the Nuclear Regulatory commission Operating exams.

Simply put, we are too stupid to live. I tell you it makes me ashamed to be human. (No, actually, it makes me believe that I'm adopted: my real parents are from some other planet. Any other planet.) Frankly, I'd rather be a macaque. In a recent study, says Carl Sagan, 13% of the participant macaques pulled a chain electroshocking an unrelated macaque whose agony was in plain view through a one-way mirror. Remember the experiment that Milgram did along the same lines? 65% of the participant people turned the knob. (The advantages of an opposable thumb – we don't have to pull a chain, we can turn a knob.) So it should come as no surprise that two out of three people are ruled by governments that torture and kill their own citizens. Apparently we'd be better off ruled by a bunch of monkeys.

Oh but those are countries with military dictatorships. You don't think the military is in control here? At the Rocky Flats nuclear weapons plant, it takes 1,087.1 hours and 43 workers to change a light bulb. (Setting up the ladder *not* included.) You'd have to be in control to get that kind of resource allocation.

Oh but Rocky Flats is in the States. Well, let me see. Canada ranks eleventh among the world's military spenders; we're actually ahead of South America. We spend *thirteen* billion dollars per year on our military – and about *half* a billion on our environment. It cost us \$500 million to participate in the Gulf War – our annual contribution to the United Nations is \$36 million. We spend *twice as much* on *one* Canadian Patrol Frigate as we do on our *entire* Food Aid program. We spend more on one Heavy Logistics Wheeled Vehicle than is in our entire External Affairs Disarmament Fund. Isn't that kind of gluttonous monopolization of resources a dictatorship?

And Canada could easily be the class rep: worldwide, \$23 million per *second* is spent on the military; there is one doctor for every 1,030 people – there is one soldier for every 43 people; and over half of our planet's scientists and engineers work for the military. (The other half work for Pizza Pizza.)

A *non*-dictatorship would make war, not to mention the funding of war, a voting issue. Only those citizens voting in favour would do the fighting. Better yet, only the leaders would do the fighting. Among other things, it would be more honest: everybody knows that wars are fought to change the minds of the leaders; you think Hiroshima or Iraq was bombed to change the minds of the general populace. And yet the leaders of two warring nations will walk side by side in and out of meetings, perhaps pausing for a photo of a smile or a handshake, while the citizens of those two warring nations are expected to be tearing each other to pieces. What is wrong with this picture? (Besides the agenda of the meeting – weapons sales from one to the other.)

There have been over 1,900 tests of nuclear weapons since World War II. You'd think they'd get it right after, say, the first hundred. What are these people thinking? Wrong question. They aren't thinking. (Most people in the military would rather kill for no reason than think for themselves. "I was following orders" is not a reason; it's passing the burden of a reason to someone else.)

Consider too, how many times we have tested armed aggression as a conflict resolution technique. Soon after the Cro-Magnons, somebody tried it and it didn't work. Then someone said, well let's try it again. And it didn't work. Let's try it again. And again. And again. There is a not-so-fine line between persistence and a mental disorder. War doesn't work, okay?

Well, not as a conflict resolution technique. That's what's wrong with this picture. War isn't really meant to resolve conflict, it's meant to boost business. (Well, that and tv ratings.) It's also meant to boost egos. (All that, just so one man can one up another man. Wouldn't it be easier just to get a shot of the guy with his pants down?) (You thought the personal was political? Other way around.)

It's a sickness. The Russians have enough to kill every American twenty times; the Americans have enough to kill every Russian forty times; so America's ahead. (Two people are standing in a sealed room in three feet of gasoline. One has 10,000 matches, the other has 20,000

matches.) This is the mentality of a nine-year-old. With arrested emotional development. (So even in a child, it's sick.)

“Torture must be kept clean, it must not be carried out in the presence of those with sadistic tendencies, it must be carried out by some responsible person, and above all, it must be humane” (Training Center for Subversive Warfare). And cruise missiles shall be called peacekeepers. And squares are circular.

Nurses who risk their lives to save a life are given the medal of honour; soldiers who risk their lives to kill a life are given the medal of honour *with valour*. Depictions of men kissing each other are considered offensive and obscene; depictions of men killing each other are considered acceptable. (They're called 'action movies'.)

Speaking of men, evidence is in favour of violent aggression being a *sex-linked* sickness. As Woolf observes, “to fight has always been the man's habit, not the woman's.... Scarcely a human being [or any other animal, I might add] in the course of history has fallen to a woman's rifle....” A lot of men really *like* to fight.

And it's an addiction. Paraphrasing Dr. Aspinall, ‘for a diagnosis of behavioural addiction, two conditions must be present: the loss of control beyond real needs [one has 10,000 matches, the other has 20,000] and the causation of harm [this is not “The Power Rangers” – that stuff hurts]. Integral to the addictive process is denial, of both aspects. [Who was it who first uttered the phrase ‘after the nuclear world war’?] Blame on the other is also common. [Have you *ever* heard ‘It was our fault – we were wrong’?] Following the guidelines of Alcoholics Anonymous, the first step after diagnosis is confrontation.’ Yeah right. Could I have a volunteer to confront these people? Yeah, the ones with the grenades in their pockets and bazookas over their shoulders.

Unfortunately the second step is something like having faith in your God. Seems to me, that's part of the problem. ‘God said we could live here.’ 'Nuh-uh, God said *we* could live here.’ ‘Maybe *your* God said you could live here, but *our* God – *the* God – said *we* could live here.’ ‘First

of all, *our God is the God*; second of all, he told us first.’ This is a frightening conversation, because ninety-five percent of American teenagers believe in a god. Forty-four percent turn to the Bible for answers. (The other fifty-six percent turn to their horoscopes.) Yeah, but they’re just adolescents. Well, Reagan (I know, he’s not even an adolescent, he’s a child really, but unfortunately he counts as an adult), Reagan would rather see us die now, still believing in God, than to grow up under communism and one day no longer believe in God. He actually said so.

“Of course I’m disturbed. We’re all disturbed. *And if we’re not, why not?*” asks Christian Slater’s character in *Pump Up the Volume*. I mean, isn’t it time to call a spade a spade? We’re insane. Either that or we’re idiots. (And the lucky ones are both.)

Because we have the knowledge; we have the solutions to our problems. This may come as a surprise because the media seems to have this rule about giving coverage to solutions: don’t. Ever notice how the news is nothing but problems? Accidents, tragedies, pain, injury, death, big fights, little fights, old fights, new fights. Oh, and football. (Which is really just pain, injury, and little fights).

Why is that? Do we thrive on conflict? Do we feel more important, more alive, if we have all these problems? (The addicting thing about addiction is that when one has a *need*, when one has an urgency – a problem? – one has importance, one is significant.) Or is it that we’re simply taking the path of least resistance, like so many pinballs? To solve a problem would be to make a change. Are we too afraid of change? Or maybe the only people with power to change things don’t want things to change because as things are, they *have* power.

We *could* change things though. As I said, we *have* solutions. We have entire institutes doing research into conflict resolution alternatives: a recent issue of one of the several ‘peace journals’ features articles like “What Would Peace in the Middle East Be Like – And Is It Possible?,” “Conversion in the Soviet Union – And Possibilities for Co-operation in the Baltic Region,” “Demilitarization and Prospects for Democracy in Nigeria,” “After Arms Control,” and

“Disposing of Chemical Weapons: A Common Heritage Calls for a Co-operative Approach.” I don't recall seeing any of these articles reprinted in, well, in *any* popular magazine, do you?

And there has been a proposal to introduce a mandatory course in high school on civic duty service: as part of the course, young people would familiarize themselves with non-violent resistance and solutions to conflicts. It could even be an alternative to detentions. Wouldn't that be, um, appropriate.

Someone has even suggested that as a condition of probation, judges should order convicted companies to take out network television advertisements telling viewers about their criminal records. (The only problem with this solution is that the judge probably has shares in the company.)

Unfortunately none of these people, none of these groups have power. Well, what about the U.N.? We have the United Nations. Surely a noble institution on the right track, surely it has solutions, surely it has power. Then how did the U.N. come to include food in its embargo in Iraq, when its own Charter declares food to be a fundamental human right? Want a clue? Concerning Indonesia's invasion of Timor, the U.N. Ambassador for the U.S. said in a cable, “The Department of State desired that the U.N. prove utterly ineffective in whatever measures it undertook. This task was given to me, and I carried it forward with no inconsiderable success.” Gee. Want a medal? (Oh. You've already got one. Sorry, forty-seven.)

Okay, but we have laws. The Nuremburg principles (to which the U.S. and other countries are bound) say that an individual has not only the right but the duty to interfere with his or her government when it is preparing for a war of aggression, a crime against humanity. So Katya Komarisuk did just that did just that – she's the one who 'decommissioned' Navstar, a weapons computer required for a nuclear first strike. (If I had a crowbar.) But then at her trial, she was not allowed to explain her motives; she was also not allowed to introduce any expert witnesses (among them Robert Aldridge, an ex-Trident engineer, and Michio Kaku, a nuclear physicist and author of

To Win a Nuclear War: The Pentagon's Secret War Plan); she was forbidden to even say 'nuclear missile,' 'first strike,' or 'international law.' (Can she say 'shafted'?)

What about the Criminal Code? It says that manslaughter is illegal. But this doesn't seem to apply in cases of cause and indirect effect. When death is not immediate or not visibly the result of some action, well, it doesn't seem to count. So the dioxin dumpers go free. (We do heroic things to save three whales caught in the ice and then continue to pour toxins into their living environment.) (My dog has no sense of cause and effect over time either.)

Okay, but we have democracy. We have an elected government. But it's kind of like the student council run by the popular kids, isn't it. (Ever feel like life is just one big high school?) And though the possibility of real participation seems minimal (is that a problem? after all, if you don't participate in the cause, you won't feel responsible for the effect), anyone can, through his or her representative, submit a private member's bill. It will even be debated in the House of Commons – but only if it wins the legislative lottery. An interesting selection process, to say the least. Further, the House of Commons debates are televised, and thus are open to public scrutiny. It's what the gorillas in the zoo watch for entertainment.

Okay, but we have negotiations. We are civilized people, we can talk things out. I also used to think we could fly. (Of the two, flying now seems more possible.) I once attended a leadership conference held by a large and powerful union, the provincial teachers' union. During the talk on collective bargaining, I was told that "Every negotiation is an exercise in perceived power": rule #1 states "If you have power and act as if you don't, then you don't"; rule #2 states the converse, "If you don't have power and act as if you do, then you do." To appear to be or not to appear to be – that is, apparently, the question. No doubt their image consultants are paid more than their policy consultants. But that which we call a lie by any other name would smell as sour. And though perception may well guide human action more often than reality, if you can't fly and act as if you do, then you go splat.

I was also told that "I need" is better than "I want." There is a difference between needs and wants and to call a want a need is misleading and manipulative. So is the inflation of needs and wants. It's hard enough to reach an agreement when two parties have different objectives; to lie about those objectives makes it harder, not easier. Wouldn't it be better if we just say what we mean and mean what we say. So if you want X, say you want X, not X times two. Even from a pragmatic point of view this makes sense: people stop believing people who lie.

"Negotiations is a game." The first speaker said it, the second speaker illustrated it. In her workshop, we opened with an ice breaker game called "Diverse Points." Basically the game went like this: the Leisure Area was for single players to form pairs in preparation for negotiation (not my idea of leisure); the Negotiations Area was for negotiation – people met in pairs and tried to reach agreement on how to divide 100 points between them in any of four proportions, 90/10, 80/20, 70/30, 60/40 (a division of 50/50 was not permitted); the object of the game was to accumulate as many points as possible and the player with the highest total score wins.

Well. First, trying to get as many points as possible is not negotiating, it's competing. Second, why isn't a split of 50/50 permitted? In the absence of significance (the points have no meaning) and therefore rationale, a split of 50/50 is, to my mind, most fair. Why structure a game that excludes fairness as a possibility? Gee, could it be that achieving a fair agreement is not the point?

I played the game, with no small measure of reluctance (and, well, after confirming that I had already missed the afternoon Pink Floyd laser show), trying to average 50 points per negotiation. To my pleasant surprise, many of the people I interacted with were quite happy with this approach, and we easily and peacefully decided who would get 40 and who would get 60 based on each of our totals so far; sometimes we agreed on 70/30 or even 80/20 if one was quite a bit over an average of 50 and the other quite a bit under. However, at least one person lied to me about her point average. This was not surprising, given the preceding talk. That person was declared the

winner, and everyone duly applauded her success. I booed. And called her names. Like ‘Nixon,’ ‘Haldeman,’ and ‘Ehrlichman.’ And was asked to leave.

There was one other thing that was said at the conference: “Collective bargaining has nothing to do with logic or reason.” Apparently it has nothing to do with ethics either.

Okay, but we have social welfare programs. For example, we have foodbanks. Stocked to the ceiling with relish, barbecue sauce, and King Kong Freeze Pops.

Failing all that, we have a few intelligent and courageous individuals among us. But you won’t see a made-for-tv movie about Bridenbaugh, Hubbard, and Minor, three nuclear engineers who resigned from General Electric because they “could no longer justify devoting their life energies to the continued development and expansion of nuclear fission power – a system they believe to be so dangerous that it now threatens the very existence of life on this planet.” Unlike Karen Silkwood, they didn’t get killed. Besides, GE owns RCA which owns NBC. And I’ll bet you didn’t read about the Los Angeles public health officials who discovered, in the 1950s, that the automobile was the source of smog – they were fired. Does GM own any newspapers?

And we have the technology. We have the soapstone stove – it can heat and bake all day with half an armful of wood. We have solar energy systems that can provide all the comforts of home. We have high tech incinerators with energy recovery and pollution controls. We have cars that can get 77 mpg, and fridges, air conditioners, photocopiers, light bulbs, computers, ovens, and dryers that use one-fourth the energy of current models. Available from Wal-Mart? Not likely. What the hell are we waiting for? Well, first Toronto Hydro had to spend \$6,000 per home in Forest Hill to place ‘unsightly’ overhead transmission lines underground.

We even know how to neutralize radioactive material! Dr. Radha R. Roy invented the process – you just knock out the extra neutrons by bombarding them with photons. The necessary equipment can be easily transported to and assembled at the desired location. (Just like Ikea furniture.) I ask again, what the hell are we waiting for?

The point is we know. Everybody knows. *Everybody knows that the dice are loaded.* I suppose that's bad enough but what I want to know is what the fuck are we doing throwing dice in the first place? I mean, it's our god-damned planet we're talking about!

I guess maybe if the climate changes begin to interfere with professional sports – if the Jays had to play in the snow, or if the season had to be shortened, well maybe then – no, then we'd just build more skydomes. (They're kinda like nuclear bomb shelters.)

'Cause we have the money. And money talks, right? Yeah but does it say anything important? Well, unfortunately, yes. That's why bricklayers see the fall of the Berlin Wall as an excellent employment opportunity. And everybody knows that Iraq was not *thoroughly* defeated because that would've been bad for business.

Whose business? Not my business. I'm minding my own business, just a-walking down the street, singing do-wah-diddy-diddy-dum-diddy-do. Just as my mom always told me: mind your own business. (Well, my mom was narrow-minded or selfish or naive or irresponsible.) My neighbours must've heard my mom though, 'cause they're doing it too. Mrs. Average Canadian says, with a touch of self-righteousness, 'We're just minding our own business.' Mr. Average Canadian agrees, 'like everyone else.' Mrs. Average Canadian elaborates, with a touch of disapproval for do-gooders and anyone else who thinks things aren't good enough as they are, 'We don't care to change the world.' If you do, and you don't have a vested interest in the issue, you're a busybody. Or a bleeding heart or a bored housewife or a ranting fanatic. Excuse me, but I have a vested interest in, um, non-toxic food. Oh, and water. And air. What I can't figure out is if everyone's busy minding their own business, then whose business is this? 'There I was, just minding my own business one day, and my planet died. Surprised the hell outta me y'know, I mean, I just live here. Guess the party Saturday night is off.'

Money. Business. There's a solution. Thornton's idea of a biarchy: split the government in half by giving each of the top two parties full control of its government, and then let them compete

for citizens, i.e., tax dollars. A legislature elected from members of the two governments would make the laws, but it couldn't collect or spend money. Maintenance of public properties could be divided between the two on the basis of budget or number of taxpayers, but otherwise, people could put their money where their mouths are. See? The political system would *have* to be representative or it would quickly find itself out of business, the politicians out of a job. (That possibility in itself would be motivation for a good unemployment insurance program.)

North Americans spend \$5,000 million each year on special diets; in 1991, the entire continent of Africa got \$800 million in U.S. developmental aid. It's possible that we could feed every starving country for the amount of money we spend on special diets. Well, if the Saharan part of Africa stopped producing a million people every three weeks. Which is part of why this possibility doesn't appeal to me. I mean, you know those pictures of whole families starving? (A Kodak moment if there ever was one.) I don't get it: if you have a child and it's starving to death, what idiot would go and make a second child? There's something very mentally deficient about that, isn't there? Oh I get it now – the parents were malnourished as kids (surprise) so they probably *really are* mentally deficient, malnutrition inhibiting development such that only 40% of normal brain capacity is achieved. Scary thought eh, entire countries full of 'mental retards' as we used to say. (Equally scary – and I say this having taught at the university level – is what the best of the 100%ers can do. Or, as the case is, can *not* do.)

Half the world's population is under twenty-five, did you know that? And the ones who aren't malnourished are crack babies or fetal alcohol syndrome babies or AIDS babies or babies who for no good reason reached adolescence and graduated from high school but can't spell 'graduated.' Makes you want to go right out and buy one of those 'Our Children are our Future' posters.

Speaking of mental deficiency though, I can just imagine the aliens, my kin, checking us out. 'Hm, a planet fully capable of sustaining a robust population and they haven't figured out yet

how to make it so everyone gets enough.’ ‘No no,’ the other one says, ‘they’ve got it figured out, they just don’t want to do it.’ ‘So – so they’re not mentally deficient, they’re just *morally* deficient.

Hey, we’re outta here.’

Can we deny it? Ethiopia was spending 42% of its budget on its army, exporting grain to the Soviet Union to pay for imported arms while its population was starving. And 56 Sparks Street, giving generously, was sending Care packages – of relish, barbecue sauce, and King Kong Freeze Pops. And Brazil – well as Chomsky has put it, “It took real talent to create a nightmare in a country as favourably and richly endowed as Brazil.”

As I’ve said though, we have solutions. The price tag put on saving the planet is \$125 billion – a mere 20% of our yearly military expenditures. Or we could, if we really wanted to be radical (is it time to get radical yet?), re-vamp instead of re-distribute. The world economy could shift from a system based on income to one based on environmental impact. Products and activities that pollute, deplete, or otherwise degrade the natural system could be taxed, to ensure that environmental costs are taken into account in private decisions. In fact, Finland and the Netherlands now have a tax on carbon emissions. We could do that too. We could also just say no to the U.S. next time it asks us to – well, next time it asks.

Or economics could be re-defined – as if women counted. Waring knows about this. As it is, the United Nations System of National Accounts (used for decision-making by the U.M., the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and national governments) considers only cash-generating activities to be ‘productive.’ So Tendai, who lives in Zimbabwe and spends eighteen hours a day providing food, clothing, and shelter for herself and her children, is ‘unproductive,’ while Bud, who sits in a nuclear missile silo for eight hours a day waiting for an order to push a button and destroy the planet as we know it, is ‘productive.’

Sure we have solutions, we have knowledge. But knowledge isn’t power. We knew about CFCs twenty years ago. At least I did. (Perhaps it was an oversight that I wasn’t burned at the

stake.) And we knew how to change a rainforest into a desert. (Eat a hamburger.) We also knew about non-renewable forms of energy and increasing fossil-fuel consumption. Isn't it ironic that if Reagan had not halted the gas mileage requirements in 1985, cars in the U.S. today would be getting six to seven mpg more than they do, and that would've translated into a savings of 1.9 million barrels of oil per day – which is the amount the U.S. normally 'imports' from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Iraq combined?

No, knowledge is not power. I'll tell you what *is* power: not caring. Apathy is power. The guy with the gun who doesn't give a damn if you live or die, and doesn't give a damn if *he* lives or dies – that guy has power, lots of power.

And do you know what has absolute power? Biology, chemistry, physics. You put a CFC molecule with an ozone molecule and they'll merge with each other or do whatever it is they do and the ozone thins and more ultraviolet gets through and the ice caps melt and the ocean warms and the climate changes and the arable land isn't.... Or release plutonium into the atmosphere and the radioactive particles will dance for 24,000 years and still be strong enough at half-life to keep going and going.... *That's how it goes. Everybody knows.* It has happened, it is happening, and it will continue to happen. We have yet to feel the effects of the CFCs put into the atmosphere from 1970 to 1990; current conditions are the result of *pre-1970* emissions. (And have I mentioned that, currently, skin cancer is up 200% and the sheep in South America are blind?) And while we continue to create radioactive waste, we have yet to do something safe with the uranium tailings that would cover the TransCanada Highway coast to coast piled six feet high if we put it there. (Instead, we hide it. On occasion, we have disguised it as building materials for homes and schools.)

There's no question about it. Molecules are omnipotent. Because molecules don't care. They don't give a damn about the consequences of their actions. To care is to presume a value system. Like the psychopath, they don't have a value system. Psychopathic molecules. Just

another way of saying 'Fate.' Just another way of saying 'God.'

But we don't see it. We're in denial. We're still trying to get our whites whiter. It's the first stage of death and dying.

Another stage is bargaining. We'll decrease emissions by 20% by the year 2000 and another 20% by 2010. We'll get rid of two nuclear weapons if you get rid of three. And we'll wear sunscreen, promise. (Ever wonder if Coppertone was involved with the CFC legislation?)

And then there's anger. Shouting in poems and stories, hollering letters to the government, letters to the editor, adding indignation and instigation into course outlines. I pumped up the volume, I talked hard. That was me fifteen years ago. When disco reigned.

And there's depression. Knowing that it didn't matter. That nothing could matter. *Everybody knows the war is over, everybody knows the good guys lost.* We're not going to make it, I know we're not, we can't argue with the odds, of accident or intent, and we can't defy molecules, cause and effect, we can't undo what we've already done, enough dominoes are down – already I hear the last one of us, crying out, words echoing into the new stillness, see me, feel me. touch me. heal me. That was me ten years later.

And then there's acceptance. This is me now. No more poems, no more stories. No more talk. I have nothing left to say. And I'm overwhelmed by bitterness and frustration, by impotence, by the lack of publication, chances to be read, to be heard – That is to say, not enough people hear what I have to say anyway.

No, that's not quite right – rather, nothing I say now will make any difference anyway. (Not that it ever did – or could've.)

It's over. We've lost it. Nothing short of a suspension of the laws of cause and effect will save us now.

I tried. I really tried. I didn't bomb Litton or chain myself to a tree; but I signed petitions, I wrote letters, I mailed cheques; most of all, I fought the battle at the source, I fought against the

inability to think, the failure of the imagination. My poetry and prose was too didactic, they said, and returned it; ironically, I was too didactic in the classroom too. I wrote to change the world, to save life, and I taught to the same end, believing that if more people would just stop and think 'X therefore Y,' if they could only imagine Y, they wouldn't do X, if they only knew.

But they do. *Everybody knows. So I said 'Fuck it!' I said 'So be it.'* It doesn't matter. It's too late now.

So, now what? What shall I do until the final bang, the final whimper? Well, either you laugh or you cry. I'll keep company with Monty Python and Dave Barry. And perhaps I'll cry one last elegy with my viola.

We had some good times, some golden moments – fire, the gramophone, the flush toilet.

And the sixties. Who wrote the elegies for that generation, our last best hope, our *Babylon* 5? Turns out they did not boldly go anywhere.

Turns out the answer, my friend, is forty-two.