

2/4 6:15 and the celestial triangle assembles itself behind an impenetrable veil. Commence Ba Gua practice. Once when you glance out the window and over the city, there's a hopeful break to the southwest, ragged and orange, but soon that flap's pulled over.

It's beginning to snow as you head for the café and by the time you get there, the flakes are coming down angled, obese and wet. When you leave, take a napkin from near the coffee canisters to wipe your bike seat semi-dry.

Pedal home in the flurry. Street's slick, no brakes – nor breaks, thankfully. Despite distracted pedestrians. Disconcerted cabs. Fast-melting, this confetti.

No tickertape any more, we've digiterized those cyphers. Still, the contents of a gazillion shredder bins will rain down on the laurel'd heads and broad shoulders of our local heroes tomorrow a.m. Generously, M.K. emails to invite you down to his office to witness the parade from the pigeon's eye vantage – three floors above where the bronze bull of Bowling Green stands, his metaphorical anthem "I Won't Back Down" having been chanted halftime by Tom Petty hier soir to the roars of a stadiumful of fans. But amidst the tumult of one primate race's triumph over another, will a lone bovine creature even be legible?

It'd be fun to take in the spectacle with M. but for the logistics of getting there: a subway ride to Bowling Green followed by an attempt to navigate the barricades, cops and throng, all in all a living chapter out of *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*. Plan B consists of sticking to your regular Tuesday post-Ba Gua class visit to Tarallucci e vino, and an hour's genuine conversation, elaborated by a cappuccino, chased by a gorgeous espresso. Go with the yin, and trust to the yang that

lies hidden within it.

Still, it's an open question: what sort of texts will shower upon our Giants? And does language, even multiply shredded, work by osmosis? Rain's predicted too, so there'll be extra pulp.

Headlong America. Better keep your tin hat on.

A patriot, New England or otherwise, may be vehement in the defense of his imagined *patrie*, and aggressive in seeking to enlarge and enrich it. His sentiments, when enacted by himself and others almost always cause other beings, even those encompassed by his own borders, a great deal of harm. But a giant, now a giant eats men for breakfast, lunch and dinner, bulls too, and uses tree limbs as toothpicks. Ask Odysseus and Jack. So, hey, what about those giants?

Two million of 'em banging around out there, last time anyone counted. The shell is made from a resin-treated anti-ballistic fabric, and their optional coverings include all sorts of camos: US woodland, three and six-color desert, and digitally pixilated, optically-confounding Army and Marine non-patterns to name but a few. Among traditional solid hues: basic olive drab, SWAT-team black, and for UN peacekeepers, robins-egg blue.

The PASGT (Personal Armor System Ground Troops Helmet) vernacularly known as the K-pot (K as in Kevlar®) and Fritz Helmet (think Wehrmacht) may be fitted out with a HMA (Helmet Mount Assembly) to which night vision goggles and acrylic

visors attach – the latter for use in riot control ops. The PASGT is often fitted with a band ‘round it, on the back of which, two reflective patches known as cat’s eyes and intended to reduce the likelihood of friendly fire mishaps. The same band may also contain ID, blood type and other useful information should the wearer be deprived of the power of speech.

First deployed in 1983 during Operation Instant Fury in Granada, the PASGT is currently being phased out in favor of the ACH (Advanced Combat Helmet, a new, even more lightweight model. Like its predecessor, the ACH will be made by the Sioux Manufacturing Corp. – the latest contract being worth some \$72 million. And this, despite a \$2 million dollar fine levied against Sioux for having “underwoven” the specified bulletproof content in virtually every PASGT it previously produced.



Eritrea, mon amour.

*Y mataremos otros.*

And what do you do with two million obsolete, and in any case substandard PASGT helmets?

The Gen trigram signifies mountain. A solid line on top, two broken ones beneath. Third son of Kun and Qian, he keeps still. Immovable, stubborn. Winter-spring. Northeast. Water. The back and small intestine. *Gen is an Overturned Bowl.*



Zhen signifies excitement, arousal, incitement to motion. Thunder. Hips and liver. East, spring and wood. First son. A solid line at the base, two broken ones above. *Zhen is an Upturned Jar.*



Time to turn over a new leaf, eric my son.

Sail from Vinland bearing southwest. Past Norumbega. Toward pre-Hudson's Bay and the funny-shaped isle between two rivers.

In the downtown silos of abstract grain, billions and billions swerved.

2/5 In a few hours, in an excess of jubilation, the financial district will empty its

waste paper baskets upon the heads of Giants. An event you will not personally record, any more than you did the painstakingly reweaving, by scores of young Revolutionary Guards, of the documents that not long before, the CIA had consigned to the U.S. embassy shredder in Tehran.

Midmorning and plunking into your “inbox” comes the twelfth heartfelt spam urging you to click on the Obama music video and presumably sing along, then head out and pull the lever for HOPE. But the smug, repetitiveness of the thing counter-inspires, makes your associations take wing to a blessed oasis of absurdum wherein *Yes We Can* becomes the official theme song of the Salmon and Tuna Processing Association of America.



Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times

While, verily, just out of frame to the left, the Bull sags two hundred and fifty

points. Metal fatigue. Knee joints going.

*Now the rainman gave me two cures,*

*Then he said, "Jump right in."*

*The one was Texas medicine,*

*The other was just railroad gin.*

*An' like a fool I mixed them*

*An' it strangled up my mind,*

*An' now people just get uglier*

*An' I have no sense of time.*

*O-bama, can this really be the end...?*

Sorry, Bob – it was just lying there.

You'd email M.K. to the effect that you'd be grateful, given your non-presence on the scene, for his recording of the downtown spectacle in any form, and he rose to the occasion, nobly. At 3:40 his email arrived:

Eric:

A few scenes in the vein of a *New Yorker* cartoon:

1. People on the sidewalk holding out their camera/video cellphones to record the people on the floats, and people on the floats holding out their cellphones to record the crowd on the sidewalk.

2. After the parade, a worker in a cherrypicker, about fifty feet up, taking toilet paper out of branches.

3. All the bagpipes and ceremonial kilts, in at least two bands.

4. A few guys perched on ledges three-four flights up. I'm sure they would never dream of doing that normally, but if the party is big enough, the power of theater: you're safe, it's not for real. Which probably kicks in, mercifully, for soldiers in battle sometimes.

Number 3 is typical, I know, but struck me as odd, not unlike, *Why should a savings and loan look like the Parthenon?*

My feelings: it was fun, it was drab, it was a touch of history (tickertape parades are relatively rare, and you get to see Eliot Spitzer waving from an arrest-me-red sports car), and it was cold (our office window was wide open).

Michael

And the wonder of it is that so many folks believe that Ali Obaba can *Open sesame* us out of our nightmare.

Got to be ten years ago that you used watch a science-fiction show called Lexx, after the name of the spaceship aboard which most of the action took place. Lexx wasn't a very political show, unlike, say, Star Trek – it's stock in trade was more tongue-in-cheek sexual innuendo, but one snatch of dialogue stuck fast in your head and resurfaces occasionally, at surreal moments like when fine distinctions are being made about which of Cerberus's three heads we'd rather have bite us in the ass.

In the scene, via an improbable plot twist, a twisted and capricious American President has taken over the Lexx and is about to fire a death ray at the earth which will surely obliterate it. Stan, the spaceship's captain, though something of a coward, tries

to play for time by asking the president why he would do such a thing – to which comes the reply:

“We are a good people driven to do horrible things.”

“No you’re not,” blurts Stan. “You are a horrible people driven to do horrible things.”

Four hours after the guy in the cherry picker unwound the toilet paper, the knee of one of the Bull’s forelegs went out and his head dipped toward the asphalt down 370 for the session. Who knows but that some of the fellows perched out on the third and fourth floor ledges weren’t rehearsing a performance to come? Running of the bulls? Probably not. More likely a running on the banks.

And tomorrow, Wednesday, ashes ashes.

Irrespective of religion, it’s on all our heads.

2/6 Stupor Tuesday’s atmospheric coda: a series of extraordinarily violent electrical storms: downpours, hailstones, high gusts and tornados that rip across Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee and Kentucky killing scores of people. A natural gas pumping station not far from Nashville explodes, sending jets of flame five hundred feet into the air. On I-40, near Atkins, AK, multiple tractor trailers keel over like Matchbox toys. A Sears outlet is entirely de-roofed in suburban Memphis by a twister that deposits dozens of air conditioners amongst the trashed cars in the parking lot. A vast university dorm complex in Jackson is transformed into cinderblock hash.

Numerous wooden houses quite literally explode. In the immediate aftermath of the winds, temperatures drop thirty degrees.

Quoth AP: "As the extent of the damage quickly became clear, candidates including Hillary Rodham Clinton, Barack Obama and Mike Huckabee paused in their victory speeches to remember the victims.... Outside one damaged home, horses whinnied in the darkness, looking up only when a flashlight reached their eyes..."

Stupefied.

*Or just a stronger horse than me?*

How would the Etruscans interpret this?

Search in vain for the headline: *Primaries Rip Across 22 States Leaving Wake of Devastation.*

2 p.m. Hard rain pounds your south-facing windows. A great kathunk from the bathroom the sound of which signifies the shaving cream has blown off the windowsill and into the bathtub. Strangely light gray over the harbor though with fluffy white clouds. Front's moving fast. Scaffolding-unfriendly conditions. On the satellite, it shows up as a nasty southwester cell outa Jersey. And there's one right behind it over Harrisburg. Another forget the umbrella and just get wet day. Seventy degrees. Out, out into it, body electric eye of the storm.

2/7 In Australia and New Zealand trees are dappled with crescent-shaped sunbeams. On account of a partial solar eclipse visible in those parts, and Antarctica.

And the commencement of Rat's Year. New moon.

If you don't like the message, change the signs.

Avant la lettre.

Bettelheim posits that a developing child, in the formative stages of identity assembly wonders "who or what projects him into adversity and what can prevent this from happening to him. Are there benevolent powers in addition to his parents? Are his parents benevolent powers?"

Eventually, if only on a gut level, the child realizes that his parents are, at best, ambivalent powers, and that these powers, whatever their qualities, are circumscribed by greater, more encompassing forces. It follows then that the child looks beyond her parents to identify other sources of power, and by a series of steps begins to construct a personal system of authority that ultimately transfers or projects the notion of benevolent power – that which can prevent him from falling into adversity, or deeper adversity – onto various forms of God, priest, godfather, king, or else another child, perhaps an elder sibling. Or some idealization of religion, tribe or country.

In any case this movement beyond the parents as a total sustaining system sets the pattern for the child's subsequent life-long dance with external manifestations of power and authority. Even if the child, now grown to adulthood, is unable to find concrete evidence of benevolent powers in his upbringing or current environment, this does not prevent the projection of her desire for a protector from adversity onto any number of possible recipients.

Jump cut to Obama, Clinton, Mac or any other imagined benevolent power

with ten thousand faces. The rub is that at some point, most people reach a point where they no longer demand that the power present itself in its benevolent aspect. It is sufficient that the power be greater than the child-adult believes himself to possess. In fact the power projection may act the right bastard. But still, however voracious, toxic, or even psychopathic the authority may demonstrably be, part of its appeal lies in its retention of potential benevolence, a latent capacity to shine down upon its worshipper and guard her from adversity.

And thus, so many human stalks rotate, like heliotropes, toward the presumed source of light, distant as it may appear. In doing so, we may extinguish by degrees, through disuse or persistent lack of self-regard, our awareness of the warming rays within – the generative power that was implanted, ironically, by our parents, benevolent or no – without condition, involuntarily, by simple fiat of the transference of energy from one set of cells to another.

But to come back to Bettelheim: the never-ending search to locate a benevolent power greater than our parents and outside the self profoundly greases the little wheels on which the big wheels turn, and helps perpetuate, generation upon generation, the enduring defaults of social life as we know it. Thus, when our child's affinity for the fairy tale – a supposedly transitional narrative form – continues to function within the political world we navigate as adults, we find ourselves charmed, led on a journey as though by a Pied Piper. But, as we know both from fable and experience, the Piper can never – never – deliver us from adversity. He, like other projections of power, benevolent or otherwise, simply does not have the capacity to do so.

In speaking of a people he calls Callantian Indians, Herodotus relates that, like

the Ethiopians, “the seed that they ejaculate into their women is not white but black, as their skin is,” and further, that they live in underground dwellings.

Hmmmm. As your grandfather was wont to say with a sidelong look and in a kind of stage Yiddish accent: “Vas you dere, Charlie?”

Maybe Tesla would have known what to make of this afternoon’s sky, but you sure don’t. Weirdest damn thing you’ve ever seen.

“All Eyes on FEMA After Tornados” headlines the *Messenger*. All? Could some species of editorial nostalgia for the way they never were be leaking out after all these years in an oblique and probably unconscious reference to “The whole world is watching”?

If a decent-sized orbiting space rock came to earth just west of Cooper Square, could we rename the street Asteroid Place?

2/8 Le taureau agil.

Huge explosion at a Georgia sugar refinery. Dixie Crystals, owned by Imperial Sugar. Several killed. Dozens injured, many with severe burns.

A potential Republican presidential candidate drops out of the nomination race and the *Messenger* speaks in tongues. “Miscalculations Dogged Romney’s Run From the Start.” Woof woof!

The sirens wail and Caliban moves on.

Whatever their espoused religions, the members of the American political class are, without exception, disciples of Lockheed Martin Looter.

Leave the debt among the dead. Bring out your creditors. From behind shadows and uprear'd walls. Let's have a good look at the faces of these recondite non-luminaries, these eminences in their varying shades of gray. Let us learn their names and histories these traffickers in obligation. Find out, eye to eye, who they are and what their relation is us, and one another.

And open up the books. All the books: banks and other corporations, governments, down to the municipality, the school district. High time for an accounting. Let's find out who's into whom for what. High time to plumb the depths of the debt – divine the present from the double entry entrails of this beast.

Surely one may print money, but it cannot be *made*. So best to get back to making things which can be, and let all those zeroes pop, like so many child's soap bubbles.

2/9 Because Gwen's new school schedule is so snafu'd, she has to take lunch 4th period – middle of the morning – way too early. Plus, via some administrative hiccup, she's got a free 6th period as well – officially billed as Study Hall. 6th period, however, falls at a much more reasonable time lunch hour. You already know that they don't

allow the kids out until the end of the day. So...

“Why don’t you use 4th period to study, then go to the lunchroom during 6th period – at least for part of it – and eat then?”

“They won’t let you in unless it’s your lunch period.”

“And how are they to know?”

She answers in a tone that indicates you’ve asked the dumbest question in Christiansdumb.

“They scan our cards.”

You know when you’ve run out of comebacks. Sure, the students have had electronic ID cards since Gwen started at LaGuardia, even before probably, and this in a school where there hasn’t been a violent crime in institutional memory. But now it dawns on you *If this isn’t fascism, it’ll have to do. Until the real thing comes along.*

And yes, now they’ve installed video cameras in the entrances to the stairwells.

Sometimes within your constant state of resistance to the encroachment of every species of imbecilic, mindless grand and petty control, battle fatigue sets in. How lovely it would be to take off the tin pot, unsling your bandolier and, at least for a little while, become a Sevillian. Or sit at a bar in Granada, watch an episode or two of “I love Andalusia.” Dip churros in a café solo, then wander up into the Generalife. April.

Not this year. But you did borrow from Cervantes a CD of Chano Domínguez, piano maestro de Cádiz. Escucha.

Late to the café this a.m., but you find a table in the banquette corner. Mark K. joins you and you sit at perpendiculars. A very humane positioning: intimacy without compression. Wide ranging conversation which he turns toward the latest local

architectural doings, Gehry et al. Back and forth, back and forth, then he asks you what you think of the New York Times building. What indeed? Hard to say. You've had a report from Floyd that he and Carmen rather like the semi-public interior space on the ground floor. But apart from the bizarre Annie Liebowitz photo murals of the construction process that you once encountered beneath the scaffolding, you haven't given this gigantic neighbor just up the avenue much conscious consideration. So you reply that, though you've appreciated some of Piano's work in the past, you find you've generally avoided looking at it. This causes a few beats' pause in the conversation during which surfaces the slightly squeamish sense you've been in Times tower denial. As though if you don't acknowledge its presence, the thing might not actually exist.

Do you think, asks Mark, that the top of it looks like the ruins of the World Trade Center? It does to him but he's not sure if other people see it that way. Now your brain is fairly sizzling. Hmmmm, you reply, calmly as you can, I'll have to give it another look with that in mind. You know what I mean, he says, wanting you to know what he means and gesturing with his fingers to approximate the iconic ground zero pillars and their distressed latticework of crossbeams. He wonders whether this detailing is a purely esthetic touch, or does it have some function? Lamely, you posit the idea that the skeletal steelwork, which you now recollect extends several floors above the roof, might have something to do with telecommunications – maybe it acts as a scrim. You're groping for an exit strategy, but all you can do is repeat: I'll have to take another look.

But you don't, even though you've a clear sightline for several blocks on the way home. And then there's that spire, reminiscent of the one on Tower 2. By degrees, the image of the Times building comes percolating up from the tarpit where you've

stored it sans awareness, in the part of your body that records things without registering them. But Jeez Louise, the top of that building is very, very strange. In architecture as in print, whatever are they trying to say?

Everything but smoke and mirrors is smoke and mirrors.

Whole Foods, Whole Body, whole botchagaloupe.

In your head rings an Italian phrase Mark taught you – with reference to one of his friends, a brilliant jazz saxophonist: *un capolavoro umano*, a human masterwork.

7: 12 p.m. The thinnest imaginable crescent of hangs medium to low in the southwestern sky. But it's much larger than any new moon you've seen it in the city before, and of a weird orange hue. If you didn't know it was evening, and hadn't already watched it set, you'd swear this rare and beautiful moment belonged to a near-total eclipse of the sun.

2/10 If levitation proves beyond your powers, try levity.