

The Academy Awards and the Coming Anarchy

There will of course be disappointments following this evenings' Academy Awards. It's a simple fact that many of the best, and most prescient work is simply ignored in its time. Citizen Kane, for example, considered by many to be the best movie of all time was a box office failure. Director Orson Wells was never able to make a film he wanted to after it.

One feature that was released with minimal fanfare by the academy was the first feature born of Fox's cancelled television series Futurama, called Bender's Big Score. Its premise was simple and prescient. A group of scammers come to Earth and con the entire population out of everything on the planet. The main characters attempt to deal with this, run away from this, and ultimately everyone on the planet gets miffed and launches an all out attack on the scammers and the robot army the scammers have built with the wealth of everyone on Earth.

Amazingly, Bender's Big Score was released in 11.27.2007 on DVD and aired 3.23.2008 on Comedy Central - long before the collapse of Lehman Brothers and popular acknowledgement of the collapse, or near collapse of so many banks, that have spurred trillions of dollars in bailouts.

How prescient the writers' of Bender's Big Score were is something I ponder. Presently financiers such as George Soros and Paul Volcker say they see no end to the present collapseⁱ and the head of Russia's foreign academy has predicted the United States will have totally disintegrated by July 4, 2010.ⁱⁱ As writer Kevin Phillips pointed out in his book Bad Money, published as the collapse was starting to be talked about, the dollar value of the derivatives and other financial junk, was actually larger than most parts of the economy connected with real good and services. Despite the fact that these "too large to fail" banks have hired some of the best mathematicians on the planet to disguise their financial junk, it doesn't require being particularly versed in mathematics to see where this is now going. The junk economy has a higher economic value than (what is left of) the economy of real goods and services. The economy of real goods and services (what is left of it) is being taxed to make up the lost value of the junk economy. Since the economy of real goods and services has a smaller financial value than the junk it will, if we continue on the present course, be completely drained to pay off the "value" of the junk. This is the basic math most of us were introduced to around First Grade.

I wonder if those involved in Bender's Big Score were looking at our past. There were many earlier examples of scammers taking over economy. One can look at the "Dot-Com Bubble" where incredible things were promised for a new technology. Scammers got investors to invest many times the value of what any of the services might possibly be worth. Stocks were traded and traded the values rising, ever rising. When the music stopped, those who'd sold their shares made mint, and the rest were fleeced. This was the same game that accompanied the selling and reselling of shares of stock which never made profit that prompted the Great Depression begun in 1929,ⁱⁱⁱ it was the same game that accompanied the building of the railroads where investors were encouraged to invest

many more times the cost of the railroad's construction for tracks that were never built. Nor is it a new concept that such scams would dominate the world's of finance. One has only to look at the Savings and Loan Meltdowns of the 1980's where a property with no value would be sold back and forth between several dummy savings and loans, each sale commanding a higher price. And when eventually the thing collapsed, the taxpayers picked up the bill in the Savings and Loan Bailout.

In fact, Bender's Big Score cannot claim complete prescience here. The scam was first laid out in Mel Brook's movie, The Producers, where Zero Mostel and Gene Wilder realize they can make more money by promoting a play that will fail, than one that is a success. Their scheme is to sell many times the value of the play in shares to investors knowing it will fail. Perhaps some of those who came up with the plans that collapsed the Savings and Loan, and now the Banking industries saw this movie, or its more recent incarnation as a Broadway musical and took the wrong inspiration.

What is different though about the current collapse from the prior ones is its scale. This (present and ongoing) financial collapse is of such a scale that it threatens, (per our First Grade math), to crush the entire society, leaving us with something resembling the scenario of the Road Warrior movies and its siblings such as Doomsday, Resident Evil, and some of the more recent work of George Romero. What could prompt such level of recklessness that the ultra-greedy would seek to destroy the entire system?

A model I found useful in understanding what was going on was laid out by author Robert Kaplan in his piece The Coming Anarchy. First published in February 1994 as an essay in the Atlantic^{iv}, and then as a book in 2,000^v as GWB came and Al Gore campaigned for the presidency. Kaplan is writing from the perspective of those who own most of what can be owned on this planet. His premise is that the ecology of the planet is collapsing, and with the collapse of the ecology a collapse of the economy, (and of course vast social unrest) follows.^{vi} We are then left with two choices: One is the repair of the ecology (which isn't happening). The other, is that we set up systems of control so that as the ecology and economy collapse, power relationships are maintained. What we are devolved to in this second scenario is a world of armored limousines moving from fortified enclave to fortified enclave in the new global village.

Kaplan then goes into some length describing the second scenario. We will see merging of military, law enforcement, intelligence and private security. Such mergers seem almost common place when we look at Homeland Security, Blackwater, Halliburton and the like. But consider that Kaplan wrote this before September 11, 2001, before the PATRIOT Act, before the Project for a New American Century, and even before the 1996 Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act, and 1995 Crime Bill which gave us most of what Bush's critics associate with PATRIOT.

To understand this is not to acknowledge it as inevitable. If we are to have any chance in this we are to proceed with our eyes open to what is going on. The continued ramping up of law enforcement, Homeland Security, Wars on Terrorism, Wars on Crime, Wars on

Drugs are there to build and feed this infrastructure that will maintain power relationships as the economy and ecology collapse. Most of the other stuff is noise and pretext.

For this reason I ask the Academy to give Bender's Big Score some form of special award. And I urge those who share this concern to commit to memory the scene where everyone from Santa to the Harlem Globe Trotters unites to drive the scammers off of Earth. The soundtrack for this scene will get you through some bad times.

ⁱ <http://www.reuters.com/article/newsOne/idUSTRE51K0A920090221?sp=true>

ⁱⁱ See Harper's Index 2.2009, item 12, citing to Finam FM (Moscow).

ⁱⁱⁱ See for example John Kenneth Galbraith's book The Great Depression.

^{iv} <http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/print/199402/anarchy>

^v 2,000 Random House, ISBN 0-375 50354-4

^{vi} A recent description of environmental collapse leading to unprecedented social unrest can be found at http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20090221/ap_on_sc/af_climate_stranded