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PSALMS OF HORROR

And how the world could
end tomorrow...

Traian Rareș Tuș

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PREFACE

“We don’t know what will happen tomorrow, but one thing is guaranteed – God’s overarching care for His children. We can be sure enough of that. In a world where nothing is sure, He is sure.”

David Jeremiah

There is truly no telling what tomorrow has in plan for us – we can all agree on this one thing, no matter our religion and beliefs. We will laugh, we will cry, we will love, we will suffer and we will experience a great many other emotions and states, but there is one to top them all off: we will live. And we must live our lives to their fullest, for every moment is a blessing, and this is our way of being thankful for that.

The inability of knowing the future is such a blessing to humans. It constitutes the beauty of life. Were one able to accurately predict every event the future will bring, that person would never be capable of attaining happiness.

But this gift often seems like a curse to us. We didn’t accept a simple life. We wanted more than that. It is within the human nature to be curious, to wish for more. Whether we are talking about physical objects, information or any other kind of earthly desire, this most certainly implies that it is also within the human nature to complicate things. We wish, above all, for a happy and easy life, but most of the times we tend to, perhaps unknowingly, work against it.

“Funny how we get attached to the struggle”

Celeste

INTRODUCTION

"How do you live in an age of bewilderment, when the old stories have collapsed and no new story has yet emerged to replace them?"

Yuval Noah Harari

I was calmly sitting at the lunch table with my family after getting back from another boring day at school. I was thinking to myself: "Oh, baked beans again?! Can't I just go to sleep and make my homework in the evening to just get over it? I mean, I'm fed up with all this school stuff... why do we even have to go to school? If only there was no school left... it would all be much better!". But man, I couldn't have been more wrong...

It all started when my mother picked up the phone. On the other end there was my father she was speaking to, but something didn't feel right. He is usually as cool as a cucumber, but this time I could hear him yelling at my mother. And it wasn't because he was angry, far from it. He was scared. Terrified even. Yet my mother didn't seem too touched by his words as she continued cooking something for later in the day. Then she became confused. Then angry. Nothing special, but then she screamed in horror when the house started shaking. And it wasn't a gentle shake so that the glass of water trips overs, not even so that the walls crack. It was a violent one, with every appliance permanently damaged, electrical circuits destroyed and the entire house collapsing upon itself. We rushed under the table as terror seized

us. I remember how I was screaming and crying when my father rushed in.

I was so happy to see him, there to save us, but naturally I couldn't hold my tears. He was even more frightened than we were. Still, he grabbed us and headed straight towards the car – a company car, a limousine to be precise. Then he started driving, faster than ever, racing through the neighborhood as every other house crumbled. It all got much worse when giant cracks in the streets began to appear. Those huge bumps made me sick... Nonetheless they didn't even come near to the immense chunks of ground that were jumping up and down. The entire city was shattering, standing no chance in front of what seemed to be the biggest earthquake one could possibly imagine.

Gargantuan holes kept on emerging, but we finally made it to the company's runway. He knew a bit of gliding so he tried his luck with the first plane we could find. What else was there to do anyway... He revved up the engine as much as he could before the chasm reached us. In spite of his greatest efforts, we weren't able to achieve too high of a speed until we found ourselves dropping into the ravine...

Yet somehow... we made it! We managed to glide along the steep walls of what used to be Earth's crust and avoid the incoming debris. We glanced back at our former home. It wasn't a city anymore... it was the facsimile of the Great Canyon...

Fortunately, we managed to escape unharmed or, better put, alive. Others were not so lucky. It was only then that we tuned up the radio to find out that this did not affect merely our city, but the entire planet. Coastline cities were now submerged underwater, while others were completely erased of the surface of Earth due to volcanic eruptions.

This was only the beginning. Minutes later, we woke up to an explosion so great that it made a nuclear bomb look feeble. At first, the light was so bright we could barely recover from our temporary blindness. But we wished we stayed that way... in darkness... so we wouldn't see what came next. Fireballs were roaming the skies while

ash and cinder were closing in like a giant curtain. As we were frantically moving our head from left to right, we were taken aback by the bolide that was targeting our plane. Another bright light. Then darkness... complete... utter... darkness. No sounds could be heard either, apart from my desperate scream. Was that it? The end of it? Is there nothing that can be done? I am sorry I made that wish! I want to go back to school! I want everything to be normal again!

A bad dream

Well... the story I told you wasn't quite accurate. It wasn't exactly real. But it surely felt real enough to me. To my 7-year-old self, at least, who ended up opening his eyes with his mother wiping the tears of his face and his father patting his back. "It was only a bad dream" they told me. Yet this bad dream has been the most vivid and horrifying one in all my life. To this day I am not certain how that nightmare felt so real, however I do know what caused it.

It was a movie I watched that evening that triggered an entire chain of reactions in my puny mind. Later in my years I have come to appreciate that movie, especially for its mind-blowing special effects. And it was for those effects, which felt so realistic back then, that Roland Emmerich's creation "2012" had forever impacted my childhood.

I didn't recall back then, but I had seen a few of his films before the appearance of "2012" – all depicting doomsday scenarios, some more realistic than others, yet none as realistic as this one. The fright was further amplified by the presumed end of days which was meant to come sometime that year, according to the Mayan calendar.

But what could a young child know? My parents weren't fooled by such claims that kept on coming in every newspaper and TV channel. I wouldn't listen to the news at the time, I don't even do it nowadays.

Though at every meal of the day we would either watch TV or listen to the radio, I wasn't able to pay much attention, so that was not a problem.

What I found tremendously disappointing were the cartoons. I remember some of my favorite cartoons being filled to the brim with these kinds of apocalyptic prophecies. Not too explicitly, but assuredly, they made us expect what was to come. And all those started years before 2012. The age of 7 was when I started to realize what things meant – the age when I saw the movie, one year before the end of the Mayan calendar – the age when I stuck my head into the pillow for 30 minutes straight on New Year's Eve so that I wouldn't witness the destruction 2012 was supposed to bring upon us.

That was how it all began...

Another Mayan cycle?!

After this unfortunate experience when I wouldn't get my head out of the pillow (which was the apogee of my heart rate), I had that feeling of relief. The feeling upon winning an argument. The feeling of getting in bed after a tiring day. The feeling of hugging someone after being separated. It was all that and much, much more. I felt like a gladiator who has just won the greatest confrontation of his life, despite me doing nothing as to favorize my winning chances – what was I to do really? But that sentiment of glory was etched into my memory, never to be erased. And it remained conceivably one of the biggest emotions of joy I've ever experienced.

Time went by quite normally afterwards. I was just feeling a bit more accomplished for the next few months. I narrated the events to my classmates to whom I've previously complained about the movie and about the news regarding a worldwide cataclysm and I was happy

that they shared my view. But before long, this short-lived happiness was obliterated as another mass destruction event broke the news.

This time it was a giant asteroid that "was going to impact Earth". I've read a couple of books and articles about those and learned about the damage they can cause, even if they come in smaller dimensions. This one, however, was 5 kilometers in diameter, or so they said. Half of the one that wiped out the dinosaurs, but still big enough to terminate us for good.

Being something novel to me, something cosmical, I didn't have too much of an idea of how we can avoid or destroy such a space wanderer, no matter how many things I read. And as expected, the news were only to worsen the already messy situation. Everyone who bit that was completely out of hope. Was there truly no way to survive an incident like this one?

In fact, there was. What was it? The incident being not even near to taking place. As I emerged myself in more and more articles I finally got to the well-documented ones. The scientific articles, written by actual scientists and not some random person in the streets who claims to know better.

The chance of that asteroid hitting Earth was minuscule, insignificant. It was less than 0.01 %. It was a rogue one who happened to enter the inner Solar System after its orbit was somehow distorted. You were more likely of dying of a heart attack while hearing the bad news than of that asteroid impacting our planet. At that point I was convinced it was just 2012 over and over again.

You probably never heard of it again, once those articles made it to the spotlight. What was the most probable cause of another apocalyptic piece of information going haywire? Another Mayan cycle.

Most people started to ignore those after a few crazy attempts of predicting the world's end. Yet there are still incredibly many who believe such things whenever they see them for the first time, without even bothering to question themselves – is it really so or am I fooled by someone aching for attention?

Nowadays, I am somewhat glad for this asteroid scandal bursting out as it was one of the reasons, if not “the reason” I started the pursuit of science, mainly astrophysics. But if you just sit and analyze how often those asteroid scandals occur you’d be shocked. I have been through the end of the world at least half a dozen times that I know of. And not just asteroids. There were also giant earthquakes, super-volcanos you name it. And those are only the widely broadcasted ones, the ones that made it to the entire world’s eyes. These doomsday events “happen”, on average, once every three years. If you were to count in all the scenarios that pop up on the internet there wouldn’t be week without you begging for a few more days.

The issue with the apocalypse

It is a known fact that people do get manipulated or at least influenced on a daily basis – sometimes knowingly, but most of the times without them even noticing. And it has been like this since the dawn of history. It’s not about the elite manipulating the masses, it’s about the masses not putting forward any resistance to conspiracy theories or simply failing to examine what they’ve heard.

And then there is one other factor which brings calamity upon our entire species. It is the fact that we people tend to let ourselves much easier influenced by the negative aspects of society than we do by the positive ones. It’s as if we are blinded to what’s good, to what makes us happy, but the moment we hear word of something bad, our pupils dilate in desire to know more about it. The human nature is a complex mechanism, too complex to be understood at its fullest.

It only goes downhill from here. The worse the news, the more people will pay attention to them and the more adepts will such a theory gain, no matter whether it’s proven or not. And what is the worst news one could receive? Well, the answer is quite

straightforward – death, or anything related to death. Sure, there are some “lucky few” who care more about other material things than they do about the essence of the world, life, theirs and others’. For the most part though, people are sympathetic beings who take heed of the well-being of others. Or that’s what I like to think. But anyway, the grand majority do care about their own lives at the very least.

So when you bring death into discussion, there is a slight retention in all of us. This accentuates even further when we refer to an actual end of everything, an apocalypse. It is this knowing that not just you will die, but everyone you’ve ever known, loved, admired, hated and everything that’s ever been will perish alongside with you, which hurts to even think about.

There is this obstacle that the human mind finds exceptionally difficult to process, that you and all of us are eventually going to die. Everything we do in this life is, subconsciously related to this idea – it’s simply an effort to distract ourselves from acknowledging that someday we are going to die. We might achieve extraordinary things, good or bad. We might be remembered, we might not be. But in the end, we are all heading towards that inevitable point of passing away.

As disappointing as it sounds, this is the way things are. And as of our current understanding of life, nothing can be done to reverse this process. Measures aimed at prolonging or halting it for some definite period of time could, indeed, be taken. Yet in the end, death is inevitable.

*“Only two things are certain in life –
death and taxes”*

Benjamin Franklin

I don’t know what to say about taxes, but I can agree with death. Now I do not mean to get into the meaning of life – that’s an entirely different subject, which would require at least another book of this size and there would still be a lot of empty spaces.

Moving back to our theoretical collective death, as humans, as species... incomprehensible as it sounds, it could at some point become a reality. And it is not necessarily the death that is our main concern, but rather when and how it will happen. This complete uncertainty of what's essentially the focal point of unpleasing events makes it even harder to digest.

Throughout the elapsing of time, ever since the beginning of our existence, we have tried to predict, or trick ourselves that we somehow foresee the very end of this existence. In reality, we know that's not the case. But there was most assuredly a point in our lives when we encountered other individuals attempting to do just that, tell us when and how will the finale of all humankind be.

The problem is that there wasn't only that one time. Many, many times has this occurred. And they were never right. You are reading this book now, which means you are not dead. You didn't perish when the world ended at the start of the new millennium. Neither did you in 2012. Neither did you in 2018 when a giant, unknown ninth planet interfered with Earth. And you likely won't in the near future. At least not due to a worldwide catastrophe. But unlikely as it may be, in reality one might occur sometime in the near or distant future. And there is no way to tell for sure.

It is, however, literally vital for us to be able to forecast potential threats to our welfare. Yes, we can calculate the trajectories of asteroids years, decades and even hundreds of years before they get close to us. Yes, we can predict where earthquakes can take place and take measures against them. And yes, we can sign peace treaties to prevent future wars. But if... if somehow a doomsday scenario were to occur, it would do so unexpectedly. We wouldn't realize its exact consequences only once they manifest. And it may be too late.

What makes such dangers ever harder to recognize by the masses and even by those in power are the unstoppable misinformation that is encouraged by news reports. When it comes to fake news... in an area like this, the Armageddon... it can actually become a death

sentence for us all. With so many hoaxes like self-proclaimed prophets and Mayan calendar cycles there will be a point, a threshold, when no one will bite it anymore. There will be many fanatics who will believe every apocalyptic announcement, but for the most part, humans will no longer take those for granted.

So what will we do when one of them is, in fact, accurate? How do you think we'll respond? Some may panic, some may stock up on their supplies and prepare for the worst, as it always has always been. But the rest of people... they'll remain calm. They might not even flinch in the face of the greatest danger our species has encountered. All of that because of so much misinformation. And it only takes one correct claim... think about that for a minute...

I was personally very impressed by a movie that was much expected and months after its release it was still thriving on the highest spots of every list. That film is called "Don't look up!" and apart from its world-renowned cast, it also consisted of an exceptionally well-written plot. It is a satire based on a very similar story, two scientists finding out about a planet-killer asteroid, as they are called, which was seemingly going to impact Earth in around six months after the two calculated its trajectory. And in spite of their greatest efforts, no one was believing their warnings and they were regarded as insane. Only when they saw the fireball with their eyes did the people understand the imminent danger. No one had taken any measures to save our species and when they realized their mistake, it was way too late.

It was a really controversial movie, with critics' opinions cancelling each other out. If I were to choose one side though, I would definitely go with the admirers. I found it particularly realistic, dare I say accurate. Of course, there were some out-of-place jokes and I sure hope something like this doesn't happen to us, but seeing how people behaved and the similarity between that society and ours... it just blew my away. The resemblance was staggering.