

2112 Absurd Words

“The brain has evolved from the inside out. Deep inside is the oldest part, the so-called brain stem. It conducts many of the basic biological functions including the rhythms of life like heartbeat and respiration. The higher functions of the brain have evolved in three successive stages according to a provocative insight by the American biologist Paul MacLean. You see, capping the brain stem is the so-called R-complex, “R” for reptile. It’s the seat of aggression, ritual, territoriality and social hierarchies. It evolved some hundreds of millions of years ago in our reptilian ancestors....

*Surrounding the R-complex is the limbic system or mammal brain. It evolved some tens of millions of years ago in ancestors who were mammals all right but not yet primates like monkeys or apes. It’s a major source of our moods and emotions, our concern and care for the young. And then, finally, on the outside of the brain **living in a kind of uneasy truce with the more primitive brains beneath, is the cerebral cortex** evolved millions of years ago in ancestors who were primates. This is the point of embarkation for all our cosmic journeys.*

The cerebral cortex where matter is transformed into consciousness. Here, comprising more than two-thirds of the brain mass is the realm both of intuition and of critical analysis. It’s here that we have ideas and inspirations. Here that we read and write. Here that we do mathematics and music. The cortex regulates our conscious lives. It is the distinction of our species the seat of our humanity. Art and science live here. Civilization is a product of the cerebral cortex.” – Carl Sagan, Cosmos, Episode 11 (emphasis added)

Having worked through a full final edit of the rules, I admit that reading the rules to GGDM might be a tedious exercise and the fullness of GGDM might be overwhelming. I even admit that I am tired of working on it, and mentally exhausted from the sustained push to the finish. It is not likely that anyone will actually ever play this game; in this at least, I have failed miserably as a game designer, if one assumes that games are made to be played. And this is one reason why I am charging for the game exactly what it is worth; nothing.¹ What, if anything, I have succeeded in doing here, remains to be seen. There may be something special here, but more likely, it is complete mediocrity and the project’s intellectual horizons, old news to the *avant garde*.²

I have to admit that what I am doing is massively complex. I sometimes forget that because I have been doing it for so long; the final edit process has revealed to me that even I have sometimes forgotten or misremembered details of procedures and parts of the rules, or where I put specific quotes, references or commentaries (thank goodness for word search!). The final edit process brought me back to the full, completeness, and holistic complexity of GGDM. I can only now imagine the hill that players must climb to play GGDM.

This is probably a good place to remember Thorngate’s Postulate of Consumarate Complexity: *“It is impossible for a theory of social behaviour to be simultaneously general, simple or parsimonious, and accurate.”* (Warren Thorngate, University of Alberta, Canada, 1976).

“The existence of Evil is no perplexity to [Aristotle’s] soul; it is accepted as a simple fact. Instead of being troubled by it, saddened by it, he quietly explains it as the consequence of Nature not having correctly written her meaning. This mystery which has darkened so many sensitive meditative minds with anguish he considered to be only bad orthography.” – George Henry Lewes

The final version of GGDM represents a youth of thinking and writing through evolving cycles of this project (but you get to read it in a few hours). It occurred to me in the last couple of years that if I were to lose the files, any or all, constituting GGDM before it is published in final form, I would not be able to start over again; it would be the end of my life, essentially.

There is a risk in taking a lifetime – whether or not I intended to do so – to complete an intellectual project; there were – and still are – many possibilities every day that could have sent or could send this entire work into the void. It is amazing that I was able to preserve the work from one computer file format to another unbroken for over a quarter century; in this, it is a point to ponder how many inchoate works (both potentially great or probably not so great) have been lost to humanity since the beginning. I have been very fortunate to live in the stability and wealth of the United States in this time and place; many others do not have the opportunity I have been given to write a work spanning a lifetime. As Yamamoto Tsunetomo stated regarding the famed Forty-seven Ronin (aka, the Ako Vendetta): “By thinking that you must complete the job you will run out of time.”

One of my main struggles over the years is deciding what sort of thing I am writing; what sort of thing is GGDM? Is it a game, a philosophical work, a work of macro-sociology, a theory of humanity, a metaphysics, a warning, a simulation, what is the point? It’s kind of vague, GGDM manages to be all of those sometimes, possibly intriguing, but probably convincing as nothing. The one sort of thing that I know that GGDM is not: GGDM is not a very good argument, does not make a very good argument in any formal or empirical sense. The best argument of GGDM is a weak, sort of fuzzy argument, a sort of metaphysical macro-social mush – on a sunny afternoon, there might be a few vaguely interesting ideas if it matters at all – and I have to avoid trying to make GGDM into a convincing argument or it will never finish.

The reader may feel that GGDM is engaged in a constant assault on their intellect. In this, I am unapologetic: Any education or experience is always an assault on our current and previous selves.

*“Where do we go from here, now that all of the children have grown up
And how do we spend our time, know’n no one gives us a damn”*

– Alan Parsons Project, “Games People Play” (1981) ³

Although I agree with Carl Sagan’s statements on most things – he is omnipresent in GGDM, and I admire his casual eloquence, he and I are very different creatures. Mr. Sagan viewed the universe with wide-eyed wonder, projected optimism, and was apparently very stung by the criticisms of his colleagues for his speculations and his popularity with the public. Mr. Sagan’s deep awe at cosmic evolution and optimism for humanity seem to me like the time of our youth when

we didn't know that our parents told us white lies, that history was sugar coated, and that the preacher at church really didn't know anything about God, or much else.

The one important point that Carl Sagan never seems to understand in all of his musings – or would never admit on television or in print if he did – is that the universe is not a wondrous playground for human intellect, rather it is a prison into which we are born without our consent (as are all other creatures on Earth, except that we happen to be – we think – more sapient than other species on Earth; that would be an amusing inquiry or absurdist bit of fiction to explore: Why would anyone consent to being born?). Some of our science now suggests that we live in a sort of hologram, which if true, is but a shadow of some other reality, thank you Plato! The universe is not our friend, if anything it simply annoys and alienates us; this is not to say that there is some higher being or malicious intent (sorry Descartes), very likely, it's just bad consequence.

Humans have always seemed to sense that there is something wrong with this universe, or that we are wrong for this universe, this sense has become more pronounced in modern times.⁴ Can you feel it, the cognitive dissonance of our existence *hic et nunc*? Do you think it inconceivable that something should evolve or occur naturally that is hostile to or wrong for the environment in which it occurs?⁵ What is cancer? Perhaps if you believe there must be a balance to things in the universe – and there is some circumstantial and anecdotal evidence to this point – then GGDM is part of the ontological balancing of Carl Sagan.

My relationship to the universe, and to humanity, is doubtless passive-aggressive – with a galactic negativity bias, and the more I work on GGDM, the less I care what anyone thinks of it. Thus, in the end, it appears that I am really writing GGDM for myself and that has always been the truth of it, probably for all writers. Burro Schmidt probably felt the same way. I won't have to worry about popularity. I have expressed my thoughts to the best of my ability, ground the arguments to the finest points, combed and curled the words, like any of the esteemed essayist and scholars of the past and time will tell in what sense, if any, they are correct, or useful, or they will be discarded and forgotten. Mr. Sagan would appreciate this idea at least. Most likely, "I have plowed the sea."⁶

This work isn't about today; I will pass, gladly so, into the nothing. My life is an absurdism, my youth gone, GGDM is all that remains to be finished. When the howling of today's critics abates, there will be the silence of centuries; the existential void.

"How much science fiction is being published now that's set in worlds that are better than ours? Not that have bigger shopping malls or faster space ships, but where the characters are morally superior, where the society works better, is more just? Not many. It becomes difficult to do it, and that's a feedback relationship with what's happening in the culture, with science fiction being the minor note. People don't credit it anymore! Not just better gizmos and more virtual reality gear, but better societies. People don't believe the future will be a better place. And that is very scary."

– Norman Spinrad, "Norman Spinrad: The Transformation Crisis," Locus Magazine, February 1999 ⁷

¹ Commentary: I may be the Uwe Boll of game design: I make other game designers, bad or otherwise, feel better about themselves that at least they didn't design GGDM. My response to criticism will be much different, however.

² Commentary: Consider, for example, that I was not aware of Edward Soja until early 2018. Could there be a more compelling fact of my intellectual ignorance?

³ Commentary: I was reminded of this song while watching the Pixar classic short, "Geri's Game." I was obsessed with this song as a young teen, in 1981-1982, I was reading Asimov's Foundation Trilogy, and this song remains associated in my mind with the Foundation books and Hari Seldon's psychohistory. I was in some sense, old, when I was young. But I am not young when I am old. It doesn't work that way, except for the Ancient One.

⁴ Citation: See Aldiss discussion of Toynbee, 2 Patents.

⁵ Commentary: For those who are wondering at this point about my mental health, I simply don't care; what matters only is that you understand this point. The college-educated reader will begin arguing about social supports and coping mechanisms to help the individual handle the petty annoyances of daily life. But all of that is irrelevant to this particular issue with the universe: Why would one need brakes if there is no need to stop? The need for brakes is indicative of the underlying problem – that is, that you need to stop, just as the fact that humans need social supports and coping mechanisms to deal with the daily stupidity quotient of the universe is indicative of the underlying problem – that our sapience has a metaphysical or cognitive dissonance with the universe in which we came to be.

⁶ Citation: Simon Bolivar.

⁷ Commentary: GGDM is not utopian – score one for understatement! Survival instinct of small furry mammals evolved into sapience magnifies to negativity bias, the defining mark of humanity. We wonder about the person who is smiling all the time. It seems logical that this would be true on any planet where life evolved to predators and sapience. One of the ideals of human utopian fiction is serene happiness from certainty of meaning.