

A combination of apocalyptic futurism and comedy.

428 Moore

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A Novel by John Corsello

For Marianne, Mathew, Pat, Ellen, Claire,
Debbie, Desiree and Joseph

Chapter I

Chaos & Nostalgia

It's New Year's Day 2035. A snowstorm has cancelled the Mummers' Parade. I started boycotting it back in 1959 when I realized most of the spectators were vomiting drunks. That memory would've dulled eventually had one of them not puked onto the back of my new winter coat forever obscuring the event's pageantry. This year will mark my 93rd birthday and time grows short. What I'm about to tell you may sound preachy. It's not meant to be and I hope you'll allow that a curmudgeon like me may actually have something useful to say. Owing to events that I'll explain a great deal of history has either been obscured or forgotten. Like a time capsule I've decided to record a small piece of it for posterity. What follows is a glance at how things got to be the way they are, how they're 180 degrees from the way we pictured them, and why my generation was a catalyst during days when we thought we could change the world.

A recent newspaper editorial entitled "Let Them Shoot Rats" details a worsening economic crisis that has shrunk municipal services – particularly trash collection – creating a ripple effect. Fairmount Park, once among Philadelphia's crown jewels, is now a garbage-strewn wasteland - home to thousands of rats that have been known to cart children off to their turd-encrusted lairs to be eaten alive. People have begun hunting them even though it's against the law. Calls to legalize their efforts increase daily, but local politicians resist. "It could lead to anarchy," "innocent people may die," "it would constitute a public safety hazard," they howl! Sadly, life itself has become a public safety hazard! Innocent people die pointlessly and widespread anarchy has existed for as long as I can remember. To the famished dying from unintended

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gunshot wounds isn't much different than starving to death. Unemployment has reached 55% and most live in a caste system below the level of the rats. If hunting them were legal their numbers might decrease and more food could be created by default. The editorial challenges the city's gutless stand. The thinking of our Mayor and City Council seems rooted in the '60s when society's structure wasn't broken, America's economy was functioning, and rats weren't running amok in our cities.

Like all other public services, funding for rat control is virtually non-existent. Philadelphia's tax base is a joke. With its population now numbering less than 100,000, nearly every municipal agency is shut tighter than a Maryland crab's waterproof ass. One bureau however - the Division of Digging – still operates and has increased its functions. The purpose of the self-styled "DOG" is to remove dead bodies from city streets to prevent the spread of disease and the air from smelling like shit! With violence mounting and food growing scarce the cadaver business is booming and the D.O.G. barely has time to "wag its tail."

America's criminal justice system borders on collapse! Civil liberties, human rights, and basic fairness have taken a pounding in the twenty first century. With help from lawmakers the judiciary ended the bail system. The average wait between arrest and trial has reached four years. The indigent no longer are provided cost free public defenders. It's now a question of how much justice can you afford? Without an attorney even mundane charges like disorderly conduct keep defendants in jail for up to four years awaiting trial. Those with money hire lawyers to dramatically lessen that time – pretty much the way things have always been except nowadays few can afford lawyers.

The atmosphere in city courtrooms hasn't changed. Confusion and bureaucratic bumbling prevail! Hearings for more than half of those arrested within the last five years never were held and most would still be locked up were it not for periodic media exposes. It seems their records either were stolen, filed improperly, or disappeared into the wastebaskets of accountably immune political hacks that don't give a microbe's ass about the rights of the accused or how effectively they do their jobs. It was quite the problem until a "solution" was found, which was trashing the bail system. That peoples' rights were trashed in the process seemed of little concern. This once was solely a poor person's problem, but nowadays poverty is universal so things have become simpler. You remain in jail until a judge hears your case, and your file consists of a 3 x 5 index card. Of course these cards in the hands of politically appointed drones can easily be "misplaced" and since few if any ever are held to account there's not a hell of a lot one can do! To all intents and purposes computers, once providing a modicum of efficiency, no longer exist. Present economic reality has caused a 70% drop in energy consumption, and along with discarded power grids went personal computers. An obscene testament can be seen across the Ben Franklin Bridge in Camden where millions of twisted, tossed computers fill a mammoth hole where homes and businesses once stood.

Drugs, prostitution, and euthanasia are legal, and with the legalization of drugs came quarantined communities known as Substance Control Centers, where addicts survive in government-sponsored oblivion. Narcotics are doled out daily to those who've signed away their rights in exchange for unfettered addiction in squalid prison like conditions. Hmmm! Free drugs! I've been tempted to throw in the towel occasionally and enroll, but something always stops me! Perhaps it's the prospect of being corn holed by half-crazed dopers unhampered by any real police

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presence. The “SCCs” literally are walled-in micro cities where chaos and bedlam co-exist with nodding junkies and mud caked crack heads. The one nearest me is located in what used to be called “the badlands” - a five square mile area now surrounded by an electrified fifty foot fence. It’s said a sadomasochistic cross dresser rules the place and as a rite of passage forces new enrollees to place their tongues between the toes of her questionably hygienic feet. The drugs may be free, but how much Brioski do you think it’d take to recover from something like that?

Public outrage over an alarming boost in sex crimes forced lawmakers to legalize prostitution in the year 2025. The “soft tissue trade” as it’s known can accommodate anything from customary hetero and homosexual activities to deviances like sado masochism and bestiality. “Sexual agents” who create “situations” for prostitutes in exchange for the highest rate of return are a prominently featured. Once called “pimps” they’re required to register with a federal bureau dubbed the Agency for Human Appreciation (AHA). In essence they’re sleazy, government regulated parasites that control prostitutes for their own personal and financial gain. They remind me in a way of the old sports agents who once represented professional athletes.

Like legalized gambling one of the aims of sanctioned prostitution is to increase government coffers by levying taxes on the world’s oldest profession. Regrettably the form-pushing, process-creating double talkers running AHA have bound the agency so tightly in red tape that last year alone their administrative costs (\$28.5 million) dwarfed the \$7 million collected from the hookers. Since bureaucrats essentially are fucking taxpayers shouldn’t taxpayers be given part of the hookers’ take?

Making illegalities acceptable is a growing trend. An example is marijuana. Once considered endemic to the so-called “counterculture,” pot, now legal, is controlled by the tobacco industry. TV ads trumpet its virtue. The latest features what in the prehistoric days of misogyny was known as a “bimbo.” A scantily clad unnatural blond sits in a wicker chair on some nameless island paradise and meows; “With all the pressures of modern life facing you each day isn’t it nice to know that Guatemala Green is here to help you relax in the privacy of your own home?” Uh huh! Many of my friends live in cardboard boxes. Paying five bucks for a pack for Guatemala Green isn’t a priority. What little they have usually is spent on synthetic food – a creation believe it or not of the pharmaceutical industry, and what now passes for peoples’ daily diet.

A black secessionist movement has begun. Its aim is creation of Uhuru – a separatist homeland within the borders of the United States. Uhuru is African for freedom. The concept has broad support and for a time was viewed favorably by the press. That was before violence set in! Non-stop secessionist rioting took place from 2014 until 2020, and despite a current shaky lull, fear of possible return to widespread fighting is never far from peoples’ minds. It’s generally taken for granted that if turmoil resumes our neutered government - in an effort to mask its failings - will force citizens to choose sides by crushing the combatants with brutal force. Most I think will support the government. To do otherwise in today’s climate of abridged liberties is to risk being crushed one’s self.

Despite or perhaps because of this I’ve become nostalgic about my younger days – an indulgence of wasted time reminiscing about events that might as well have taken place on another planet! Still, more and more I find myself drifting back to the ‘60s when

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The Viet Nam War raged out of control and I was among thousands protesting it on jammed city streets. Widespread violence plagued the nation's poverty areas, but goaded by grass roots activism of which I was part, Congress moved quickly to address the ills that'd caused those communities to reach their boiling points! I was a developing musician playing drums in a Rock n roll band with dreams and aspirations. The Women's Movement largely in its infancy was gaining momentum. They called men like me "chauvinist pigs" then and sadly my behavior justified that label! We've since elected a women President, both professional and amateur sports have been sexually integrated, and the Women's Movement has evolved into a force that permanently altered gender roles within society. Like most modern men I've done an about face regarding the contributions of women to our culture. But in those days getting laid was the singular focus of my archaic mind!

Whenever the '60s are discussed, and I can't recall the last time they were, things like peace, love, hippies, protest marches, the Viet Nam War, and Woodstock are the usual topics. But what I remember most is an unapologetic period when my friends and I were immersing from a cocoon of provincialism - a blue-collar enclave of stagnant mores and accepted violence - where we considered ourselves progressive thinkers challenging contentious values. Our contemporaries, whom we labeled "The Street Fighting Primates," were thugs poisoned by the toxins of sadism and vindictiveness. Moribund in their thinking, they remained unaffected by changing times or the elixir of new and exciting ideas. In our twenties and still living at home we too were provincial and rather oblivious to the larger world beyond our community. Our limited social calendar included standing on a street corner quietly sharing these "new and exciting ideas." To overtly voice radical thoughts was to risk having our heads broken

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by The Street Fighting Primates. We wanted to protest the war, involve ourselves more deeply in liberal politics, smoke pot, listen to the new progressive rock music, and be as promiscuous as humanly possible.

In a twenty first century America that no longer is a global power, but more an unstable embankment facing hostility from inside and outside its borders. Where technological advances like synthetic food barely keep starvation at arms length, and where most of my enduring memories are bad ones, reminiscing about youthful impiety is soothing solace indeed. In these damnable times a return to armed conflict is an ever-present threat. The sins of our governmental forefathers – waste, corruption, greed, and surrender to the drug plague through legalization – have been visited upon the masses. An eruption of racial war is imminent and there simply is nowhere to hide. And that I think is why lately I've become so nostalgic about my youth and the days of 428 Moore. Apart from being an oasis of shared values, idealism, new ways of thinking, and male bonding in a community sorely needing it, 428 Moore was somewhere to hide from the provincialism and violence surrounding us. It was our secret place.

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