

No More Ideas

by Todd Maupin

Charles H. Duell was that patent clerk in 1899 who was claimed to have said that everything that could possibly be invented had already been invented. Duell's statement was proven premature; likely he just wanted to go home early that day. And although he was never truly correct, he was vindicated many decades later when we ran out of ideas.

We knew it was coming, like the mining of the last Bitcoin. The supply of ideas was dwindling and everyone knew it. We had hoped that it could be avoided somehow like Bruce Willis with that asteroid. This was not a drill. It was a disaster that could not be averted. None of our heroes could save us. Scientists had been working frantically to reach an alternative before it was too late. Ironically, their new ideas that were realized in this crusade only subtracted from the ideas remaining, hastening the process to an even more frightening pace.

Everyone who was alive at the time remembered exactly where they were and what they were doing when the final idea had been announced. My own anecdote is less riveting than most. I was taking a nap, and when I woke up, it had happened. Before looking at my phone, I heard someone outside yelling the dreadful news. It was a grim milestone for the world, a red letter day that no one had ever wanted to arrive, but it had. Usually, when events of such magnitude occur, people remark that our lives will never again be the same. This time, however, they would be. Our lives were destined to stay this way forever.

We looked to our leaders, our entrepreneurs, our so-called experts, but they were no better equipped than the rest of us. Even that lout with the space and electric car empire just shrugged. It turned out that he was not any more of a visionary than Ed Begley, Jr. More an

Eddard Stark than a Tony Stark, without the charm of either of them, or the charm of Begley, Jr. for that matter, and probably not even Ed Begley, Sr., who was the most angry man of the twelve.

For a while, we had hoped it was not really true, that it had not verily happened yet. We wished that it would be like the fifth golden ticket found in the Wonka Bar contest being revealed a fake, that our supply of ideas had not been exhausted yet either. But this time, there was not another golden ticket. There were no more ideas. Sorry, Charlie, the ideas were all gone. All used up. Then someone decided to regurgitate Charlie and the Chocolate Factory into a film for the fifth time. The film property had been considered sacred ever since Nicolas Cage won his posthumous Oscar for the role. But what else could Hollywood do? There were no more ideas.

Once the shock and despair had settled in, and dissipated, a kind of blissful resignation and solace washed over all of us, like a soothing fog bank. We felt some steely satisfaction, a resolve, in a guilt free existence in which we could finally rest on our laurels. No need to excel. For us, competition and ambition were over, under pressure no longer to be anything but plain vanilla. Ice cold. Here we were, all of us on ice. This was it. We had reached the top of our Everest and discovered that it was an infinite plateau. What next? There would be no next, just more of the same. Bleak, but never oblique.

Perhaps you are expecting me to tell you how some plucky idealist defied the odds and fashioned a new idea after all. No, sorry. This did not come to fruition. Besides, how many times had that been a story arc already? You may as well take two pairs of everything on an Ark, which was another stale idea, by the way.

How did we maintain our existence? It was easy actually. We just continued doing everything the same way we always had, and it worked well enough. Occasionally, some things changed, but it was really only a shell game in which we were fooling ourselves. We built

things out of copper that used to be made of plastic, using that excess plastic to build those other things that used to be made of copper. There was no longer a “new and improved” anything. Everything was “classic.” Coca-Cola reverted back to New Coke and called it “Classic New Coke.” And people bought it and drank it, because no one had any better ideas, or any ideas at all.

Why I am telling you this story? What are your expectations? Would you like some mystery, a murder or a crime to solve? Some romance that defies class, racial and socioeconomic barriers? Tragedy? Comedy? International intrigue? Historical fiction? Let's be honest, though. Historical fiction is just a veiled method to repackage romance stories.

Sure, I could incorporate one or all of those elements into this tale for you. And perhaps you would delight in discovering or predicting that my story is exactly like that other story you have already read or have even told yourself. Because any plot I concocted for you would be exactly the same as what you already know. After all, this is our world now.

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