

## *If Pigs Could Fly*

an essay by

Munroe Scott

Want to play a game? It's called "Let's pretend to believe".

We play it all the time.

Been to the theatre recently? Maybe to the local Little Theatre or even to a big city showplace? Makes no difference. In either place we pretend to believe that there is an invisible wall between us and the actors. We can see them, they can't see us. It's a convention that lets us pretend to believe that we're voyeurs of other lives.

Or maybe your kick is science fiction movies and you're willing to pretend to believe that aliens are attacking from Mars? In 1938 Orson Wells scared the pants off an entire generation of radio listeners who too readily entered into the game even though author H.G.Wells had spun the yarn in print 40 years earlier.

H.G.Wells, who was a genius at this game, has told us that the secret is to ask people to pretend to believe one strange thing and then whatever follows should be ruthlessly logical. He suggested we pretend that pigs can fly and then see what logically follows.

So – are you ready?

Instead of flying pigs let's pretend to believe that the world already has reached or is about to reach the moment of "peak oil" – the point at which from here on demand will outstrip supply until, soon, there is no more oil. (Actually, this isn't as big a leap as imagining aliens from Mars. Most of the world's top level oil experts believe it's true and that we're probably already on the downward path to where the well literally will run dry.) But even if you think that's a lot of b.s. the idea of the game is that for the moment you pretend to believe it. Okay then – what follows?

You can develop your own scenario, but here's mine.

- Most of the world's countries have either already created a lifestyle fully dependant upon oil or are in the process of doing so. This does not just mean using oil for energy but also using oil as an ingredient in ammonia, anti-histamines, antiseptics, artificial turf, asphalt, aspirin, balloons, bandages, boats, bottles, bras, bubble gum, butane, cameras, candles, car batteries, car bodies, carpet, cassette tapes, caulking, CDs, chewing gum, combs, computers, contacts, cortisone, crayons, cream, denture adhesives, deodorants, detergents, dice, dishwashing liquid, dresses – oh hell, we're only at the letter "d" and the list goes on and on – look it up on the web for yourself.
- The more affluent the country the less likely are its people to be willing to give up their lifestyle.

- The affluent lifestyle is expanding from country to country so the tendency is to feverishly extract more and more oil, as is already being done in the Alberta Tar Sands (probably the most environmentally destructive project on earth, but let's not get derailed).
- Since the oil supply has an absolute end to it every country wants to ensure its own source of supply. This is done by corporate contract and when that doesn't do the trick, by military might. After all, the principal mandate of any government, particularly a democracy, is to protect its people. The oil wars are already underway – the Sudan, Iraq, even Afghanistan. (Afghanistan has been earmarked for years as an essential thruway route for pipelines.)
- As supplies dwindle, the oil wars spread. Of course they continue to be conducted in the name of freedom and democracy. Spreading freedom and democracy gives off an aroma of morality whereas preserving an artificial lifestyle stinks of greed and privilege. (As you can see, there are lots of pretend games going on inside our master game. Sort of like Ezekiel's wheel within a wheel.)
- Small countries that have oil, and certainly the non-nuclear ones, are at first coerced and if reluctant to share (share being a euphemism for give it all up) they are invaded and pumped dry. (It's no wonder the big guys are so het up over the idea that Iran might develop nuclear weapons. Bloody nukes complicate the sharing issue.)
- In case you hadn't noticed, Canada is non-nuclear in the weapons department. Of course we're already having our belly ripped wide open so invasion for oil won't be necessary. But a thirst for water might bring in the troops. (Woops! Let's not go there. Water takes the game to a whole new level. More than half a century ago Canada's favourite World War II general, Andy McNaughton, said that if Canada and the States ever go to war against each other it will be about water. Another wheel.)
- Eventually some state, or some group, uses a nuke. Whether it is delivered on a rocket or in a suitcase is irrelevant.
- Even without a nuclear termination the oil *does* run dry and paradoxically this has been achieved all the more rapidly by the vast consumption of oil by the war machines and war industries that have been striving so mightily to protect us from the inevitable.
- The few billions of the human species who might be left can now buckle down to the business of adapting to stone age conditions that in earlier and possibly better days were able to sustain a few hundred thousand neanderthals.

How's it going so far? Still hanging on to the belief the world will indeed run out of oil? That it must run out? Okay then, let's keep playing. Even if we believe the end of oil is inevitable, I see an escape hatch.

- ★ A major consuming force hurrying the end of oil and the resultant end of our current lifestyle is the very force currently trying, so we are told, to save it – the machinery of war.
- ★ Scrap the industries of war and rein in the armies of war. This is a conservation step of magnificent proportions. (Some bean counter can give you the figures but you know damn well you don't need them.) The end of oil will now arrive a little farther off in the future.
- ★ Enormous sums of money are saved almost instantly and are diverted to developing solar, wind, hydrogen, tidal, hydro, you-name-it, energy.
- ★ The economy, almost devastated by the cessation of war industries, rebounds. (Imagine that hundreds of square miles of Alberta, where the oxygen-breathing carbon-absorbing boreal forest has already been wiped off the earth, are now covered with solar panels.)
- ★ By refusing to go to war for oil we have extended the life of oil and have bought time to phase out our dependence on those myriad things we started to list earlier on. It gives us time to make the transition to a sustainable lifestyle.
- ★ As a bonus we keep the air pure enough to breathe and the water clean enough to drink, which is nice because, without either, our grandchildren all die.

So, if you're willing to believe there is a foreseeable end to the amount of oil that our old bucket of a planet can hold, those are two logical scenarios for you. What did you come up with?

\*