

# Look to whiny dogs, science for hope

When my dog emits a long, high-pitched hum from his nose, I often tell him, "Use your words." (He hasn't yet, but when he finally does it will have been well worth the years of encouragement.)

When he hums around others, I explain he's so packed with goodness that it comes seeping out like sweat from a ballerina, except in the form of a rather annoying noise.

Or if he has a particularly plaintive tone, I blame it on the unbearable lightness of being Duncan.

If it seems I spend an unusual amount of time analyzing my dog's thought processes and emotional well-being, well, maybe so. He intrigues me.

Duncan and other dogs are firmly grounded in the moment they're in. They are predisposed to happiness. If they're feeling sorry for themselves, it's usually for an easily understandable reason: absence of a favorite person, or a human pack member's unwillingness to share his dark chocolate marzipan bar.

Unburdened by complicated expectations, they are content with companionship, clean water, decent food and a warm place to sleep. All the dogs I know love life — except for the fleas and loud fireworks.

Dogs devote no time to worrying about supposed clashes between civilizations. Neither, I think, should we. Considering how seldom most people avail themselves of the lessons of the past, they might just as well be dogs. But those who read history find ample consolations in the fact that, for all our whining, there has never been a better time to be alive.

If appalling cruelties like the Paris attacks make us feel insecure, it should not be because they are some horrifying new thing. Humanity has always had its mad dogs. But until very recently, local authorities would hunt them down, hang them from the city gate, and chances are good that ordinary citizens in the next nation over would never have been vexed by the whole affair.

Sadly, in an age when you can have dinner in Seattle and breakfast the next day on Rue Cler in Paris, vexations can get in our faces pretty fast. We can't afford to be quite as carefree as a dog. But that's why we're spending \$65 billion on the Department of Homeland Security this year. I'm content to pay them to do a lot of the worrying for me.

A good reason to be optimistic about humanity's prospects is realization of how far we've come, and how quickly. The literally teetering stacks of books by my autumn bedside include 2008's *The Age of Wonder: The Romantic Generation and the Discovery of the Beauty and Terror of Science* by Richard Holmes. For anyone lucky enough to know the Aubrey-Maturin series by Patrick O'Brian, called in *The New York Times* "the best historical novels ever written," *Age of Wonder* provides a spirited survey of the actual "natural philosophers" upon whom Maturin's fictional character is based.

Recently rereading O'Brian's last eight books in combination with Holmes' *Age of Wonder* was like taking a time machine back to when Ben Franklin was investigating electrical phenomenon, Joseph Banks was botanizing the South Pacific and William Herschel was discovering Uranus, the first new planet found since ancient times.



Matt Winters



Duncan, when in a pensive mood, wears the coffee tablecloth like a droopy hat.

Matt Winters/EO Media Group



In 1830, safety lamps, like the one pictured here, were considered one of the greatest lifesaving inventions of the modern era, allowing miners to carry open flames for illumination in underground coal workings without setting off methane explosions. It is pictured with a bison skull and a few other objects in Matt Winters' "cabinet of curiosities."

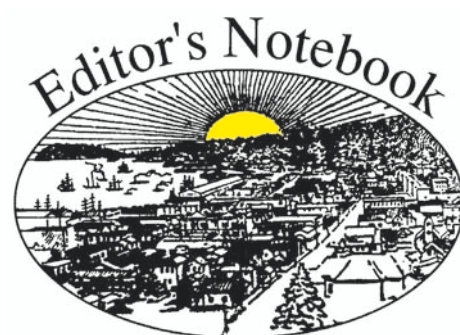
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Humphry Davy was a science celebrity virtually unknown to me until *Age of Wonder*, an embarrassing gap, since Davy may well have saved the lives of many of my ancestors. Among other achievements, Davy was celebrated for inventing a lamp that avoided deadly methane gas explosions in the mines of Northeast England, in which a quarter of my male forebears worked.

My office is a kind of Victorian curiosity cabinet piled with obscure historical and family objects, including my grandfather's safety lamp, which I've had since I was a boy. I last lit it about 45 years ago, but it was always a minor mys-

tery to me how an open flame could be carried through methane without something blowing up. Thanks to *Age of Wonder*, now I know.

Surveying the victories of his era, Herschel's son John — himself a great scientist and president of the Royal Society — counted Davy's safety lamp as one of mankind's greatest lifesavers. Also on Herschel's list: the lightning conductor, the lighthouse lens, iodine and chlorine disinfectant. These things — some still commonplace, some entirely outmoded by subsequent advances — alleviated more death and



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suffering than can be easily imagined. Few alive today would exist if our great-grandmothers' infected scratches had not been cured by iodine, or great-great-grandfathers' boats weren't kept off the rocks by a friendly Fresnel lighthouse lens, piercing the darkness 20 miles out at sea.

Quoting Shakespeare, in 1830 Herschel wrote that a contemplative man finds, "'Tongues in trees, books in the running brooks; sermons in stones, and good in everything.' Where the uninformed and unenquiring eye perceives neither novelty nor beauty, he walks in the midst of wonders."

If there is any good reason to be discouraged with our times, it may be that so many politicians and citizens willfully reject science and all the astonishments it reveals. They are like woefully spoiled children who live in a marvelous mansion, deliberately ignorant of the hard work of generations that it took to put them there.

Closing *Age of Wonder*, Holmes writes this wise valediction: "Above all, we need three things that a scientific culture can sustain: the sense of individual wonder, the power of hope, and the vivid but *questing* belief in a future for the globe."

We'll have to work at it — solutions don't find themselves. But there are many reasons to be optimistic about the human race.

— M.S.W.

Matt Winters is editor and publisher of the *Chinook Observer* and *Coast River Business Journal*.

# Seven strikes: Obama's phony war

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER  
Washington Post Writers Group

WASHINGTON — Tell me: What's a suicide bomber doing with a passport?

He's not going anywhere.

And, though I'm not a religious scholar, I doubt that a passport is required in paradise for a martyr to access his 72 black-eyed virgins.

A Syrian passport was found near the body of one of the terrorists. Why was it there? Undoubtedly, to back up the Islamic State boast that it is infiltrating operatives amid the refugees flooding Europe. The passport may have been fake, but the terrorist's fingerprints were not. They match those of a man who just a month earlier had come through Greece on his way to kill Frenchmen in Paris.

If the other goal of the Paris massacre was to frighten France out of the air campaign in Syria — the way Spain withdrew from the Iraq War after the terror attack on its trains in 2004 — they picked the wrong country. France is a serious post-colonial power, as demonstrated in Ivory Coast, the Central African Republic and Mali, which France saved from an Islamist takeover in 2013.

Indeed, socialist President Francois Hol-

lande has responded furiously to his country's 9/11 with an intensified air campaign, hundreds of raids on suspected domestic terrorists, a state of emergency and proposed changes in the constitution to make France less hospitable to jihad.

Meanwhile, Barack Obama, titular head of the free world, has responded to Paris with weariness and annoyance. His news conference in Turkey was marked by a stunning tone of passivity, detachment and lassitude, compounded by impatience and irritability at the very suggestion that his Syria strategy might be failing.

The only time he showed any passion was in denouncing Republicans for hardheartedness toward Muslim refugees. One hundred and twenty-nine innocents lie dead but it takes the GOP to kindle Obama's ire.

The rest was mere petulance, dismissing criticisms of his Syria policy as popping off. Inconveniently for Obama, one of those popper-offers is Dianne Feinstein, the leading Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee. She directly contradicted Obama's blithe assertion, offered the day before the Paris attack, that the Islamic State (aka ISIL) was contained and not gaining strength. "I have never

been more concerned," said Feinstein. "ISIL is not contained. ISIL is expanding."

Obama defended his policy by listing its multifaceted elements. Such as, "I hosted at the United Nations an entire discussion of counterterrorism strategies and curbing the flow of foreign fighters." An "entire" discussion, mind you. Not a partial one. They tremble in Raqqa.

And "We have mobilized 65 countries to go after ISIL." Yes, and what would we do without Luxembourg?

Obama complained of being criticized for not being bellicose enough. But the complaint is not about an absence of bellicosity but about an absence of passion, of urgency and of commitment to the fight. The air campaign over Syria averages seven strikes a day. Seven. In Operation Desert Storm, we flew 1,100 sorties a day. Even in the Kosovo campaign, we averaged 138. Obama is doing just enough in Syria to give the appearance of motion, yet not nearly enough to have any chance of success.

Obama's priorities lie elsewhere. For example, climate change, which he considers the greatest "threat to our future." And, of course, closing Guantanamo. Obama actually released five detainees on the day after the Paris mas-

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sacre. He is passionate about Guantanamo. It's a great terrorist recruiting tool, he repeatedly explains. Obama still seems to believe that — even as the Islamic State has produced an astonishing wave of terrorist recruitment with a campaign of brutality, butchery and enslavement filmed in living color. Who can still believe that young Muslims are leaving Europe to join the Islamic State because of Guantanamo?

Obama's other passion is protecting Islam from any possible association with "violent extremism." The Islamic State is nothing but "killers with fantasies of glory." Obama can never bring himself to acknowledge why these people kill and willingly die: to advance a radical Islamist millenarianism that is purposeful, indeed eschatological — and appealing enough to have created the largest, most dangerous terrorist movement on earth.

Hollande is trying to gather a real coalition to destroy the Islamic State, even as Obama touts his phony 65. For 11 post-World War II presidencies, coalition leading has been the role of the United States. Where is America today? Awaiting a president. The next president.



Charles Krauthammer



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