

# Fearkiller

*by*

Chris Maley

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*To a small group of friends who read earlier, convoluted drafts of this and gave me their thoughts: thanks for the good, the bad, and every what-were-you-thinking-here-because-frankly-I-have-no-idea-whatsoever. Since this was my first time doing this, I can't tell you how much your feedback was appreciated.*

*For Lisa, Kathy, Justin, Jim, Lindsey, Ann, and my brother Merlin.*

*Justin, thanks for the cover, rocking that idea to life.*

*And David my friend, thank you for my photo.*

*There is no illusion greater than fear*  
—Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, 4th Century, B.C.

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EGAN

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Note to Old You.

Some type of song exists somewhere.

It's about knowing what we know now. Today. Only back then, yesterday. When we weren't as old as we are now. When we were younger.

It's a song about regret.

Can't remember the exact words, but the idea in this song is about regret. Maybe this song is about destroying regret the nanosecond before it destroyed you.

From the back room, Egan yells that he's sorry I feel this way.

Songs about destroying regret. There should be more songs about destroying regret. From this point forward, this feeling will no longer be a part of this story. Fear is the main character.

Live music. You and Old You share a bond through live music.

From the back room, Egan is communicating that he is sorry for the way I feel right now.

Where's the remote? Seen this episode a gazillion times. Egan is sorry.

Click. "And The Fear Index is holding steady—" the newscaster says, from behind his desk.

Thanks, Mr. Newscaster, breakthrough journalism at its finest.

"Hey, Egan, The Fear Index is holding steady," I yell. "I thought you could use some good news." Click.

Wait—I thought this game was on tomorrow night. Sweet.

“I’m sorry that you feel this way. But think of my kids.”

Egan is again using his three children to justify why he shouldn’t be beaten to death with a hammer. The same children who inspired him to have affairs with other women while his wife was pregnant with them or raising them. Egan is using those children to justify why he should live.

Hey SuperDad: your youngest one, the day you told everyone that your wife was pregnant again, how did you announce this news?

“If it’s another girl, I’ll sell her to an A-rab or some Chink.” Chuckle, chuckle.

Didn’t you say that? Sure, it was a joke, but didn’t you say that? Chuckle, chuckle.

“Please, think of my kids—”

“Shut up. We *are* thinking of your kids.”

Know what’s funny here? Egan the Exec inspired this whole crazy adventure, with his combination of ineptitude, leading by fear instead of leading by example, destroying departments then justifying things by recommending layoffs, then causing more destruction with each promotion from Corporate—all with that entitled smirk on his face.

But Egan the Family Man is, the more you think about it, contributing to this plan as well. Harassed women aside, us workers got the better end of the deal.

That guy is the vision of success in the year 2010. How did the world get to the point where he is a vision of success?

“I’m sorry that you feel this way.”

He’s pleading for help again—no—he’s trying to guilt-trip me into stopping all of this. Telling me that I have to think—not of him, but—of his kids.

Egan, around the office you sure weren’t afraid to bring up the expensiveness of your kids. Or how your wife’s ass used to look before your kids. Then you would switch gears and kill productivity or—

“Egan: sorry to talk work for a sec, but remember ignoring that customer’s directive, then shifting the blame to the Phoenix office? Two people lost their jobs, you know.”

At its core, ego is fearful, panicky, ignorant, miserable, doubtful, and uncertain.

Yet manifested correctly, ego is embraced and righteously unleashed. Because our world embraces and worships fear, panic, ignorance, misery, doubt, and uncertainty—even ruthlessness, relentlessness and remorselessness—more and more each day.

Open up a newspaper. Scan the headlines for a bit. See?

Egan: physical discomfort aside, this must feel so honest compared to, say, setting up Sharon and Stevie to be fired.

“And admit it: part of the reason for the fearmongering was to smokescreen the fact that you had zero idea what you were doing. Ferocity masking inferiority.”

Part of what makes this whole hammer-death-beating adventure so fun is that it puts into action those intimations and words Egan wielded to hurt others.

His fear, turned back at him. That intimidating yet empty threatening stance, we’re breathing some air into that stance and redirecting all of it right back at Egan.

Him trying to appear composed. It highlights how seriously he takes the concept of himself. Of Egan. It’s almost like Egan® or something.

And *drop* this whole ‘ruining-those-kids’-lives’ thing, dude. More than one perfectly fine adult grew up without both parents. And many kids who grew up with both parents became detriments to society.

“Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris each had two married parents. So did Jeffrey Dahmer. Ted Bundy and Charles Manson’s fathers disappeared when they were young. And countless other kids in both of these situations grew up just fine. Sound complicated? This is life. That crazy little thing called life. Your logic, it’s flawed.”

Besides, ‘A-rab or some Chink’? Seriously?

Egan was one of those white guys who would say something offensive in the guise of a joke—a black joke to a black guy, a blonde joke to a blonde. All very offensive, then he’d pull out the “I was just joking.” Or, “HEY. It was a joke...” if this didn’t appear to appease things.

“How did you not only manage to keep your job after the SuperCompa customer firing us for your oversights, but get a promotion as well?”

Though in all honesty I’ll admit that even though he destroyed our grandkids’ futures, Egan and people like him got shit done. I didn’t.

So, one day, I decided—no—I had an epiphany.



I looked at myself in the mirror and said: I wanna do something. Be somebody.

I wanna strut down the street and have people wave and say, “Heyyyyy! It’s the guy who beat Egan to death with a hammer! You da man, dude! The economy is rawking—I got two job offers today!”

And as I strutted I’d respond with a wink, a finger-gun-click, and a “Backatcha, babe!”

Here’s what I want: I want to be at the apex of a phalanx of ecstatic working-class folks screaming my name.

All of us running down the street, me in a pair of grey sweats, wool hat, arms raised in the air at the head of the working-class-folk phalanx, everyone high-fiving and fist-pounding, jumping on and diving off the roof of cars, all the while the economy rocking, then rocking even more, then rocking even more.

Everyone, at some point in life, no matter their race, creed, gender, etc., should experience what it is like at the apex of a phalanx of ecstatic, working-class folks.

Me. The tip of the spear. Leading this people-phalanx down the street and our economy upward.

I wanna go the distance.

Egan knew how to go out in the world and be somebody. Now I’m stealing a page from that playbook—bullshit. I’m writing a *new* playbook—

Know what? Egan fucked over way more than the working-class people. Shit, anybody that’s been fucked over by Egan or men like him in any way shape or form—

All of those people, screaming my name, cheering me on. Afterward, I wanna sign autographs.

True: I began this millennium face-down, passed out on the floor of a laundry room, keeping an eye out for Y2K and signs of the end of civilization. And since then, in those ten years, it all lead me here.

To the point where I’m about to beat one of the worlds’ worst executives to death with a hammer.

A guy that, if he was the same chip-on-shoulder, entitled prick he is today, only he was good at managing and leading people and getting them to perform, wouldn’t be here. That guy, though he would be an asshole, would be alive and well.

Egan? He only had the fearmongering part down. The revenue-generation and help-people-do-their-jobs-better things, not so much.

See, this hammer death beating isn’t a personal attack. It’s professional.

Compile a true performance review for Egan, not the one the world writes for him to make shareholders happy. Look at Egan’s actual numbers. See? This is just a business decision.

It’s the year 2010. Everything he screwed up, every time a harassment claim was filed, he ended up positively benefiting from the negativity he created.

And then an economy crashed. He still benefited.

A man that is living proof that the system is rigged and it benefits a few—even those who are poor performers—more than most. Well, I’m about to murder him.

Then I’m going to feed his body parts into a wood chipper I’ll park by the shore of a secluded little cove on the lake.

It’s off-season, so with the rainy weather and all, I’m not expecting company out there. Once I’m done, I’ll push the wood chipper into the lake at this spot close to shore where the bottom drops off kind of suddenly. It’s a little spot I discovered years ago, on a picnic with people who no longer speak to me.

The cove itself is secluded, and boaters avoid it with the sandbars. The drop-off itself should send the wood chipper say, ten feet down. I give it at least a few years of anonymity. And by then, if it ever does get discovered, Mother Nature will have taken care of any last traces of Egan.

Somebody has to try and save this economy. Maybe this will—

Wait. I don’t know how much longer I’ll be around after Egan is gone. Old You deserves an explanation though.

Before we go any further, think about two things:

One: Learning how to properly state “I don’t know” is the path to success in this millennium.

Two: Embrace fear. Once you do, you will go far.

Yeah, a wood chipper. For the job it needs to do, it’s efficient.

The world is obsessed with finding efficiencies nowadays.

## 2

“I’m sorry that you feel this way.”

The state you’re in now, Egan, at another point in time, this would have disgusted me. But now it makes me want to capture as much of each moment as possible.

I’m positive some frame of reference will reveal itself. It will either materialize for somebody else or it will guide me to—wait, I don’t care what lies down this path.

But I have faith that this world will right itself soon. I’m certain this world will right itself soon.

Intriguing: so many people who aren’t about to murder somebody have given up all hope for the future of our planet. They’ve abandoned optimism.

I couldn’t believe in the human race more right now if I tried.

Quit believing in yourself. It opens your eyes to other possibilities—  
“Please...”

For some reason, I blurt out “Thank you” as an answer to Egan’s “Please.”

Mainly to cut “Dad” off before he brings up his kids. And it’s the funniest thing ever said.

A couple of minutes later—I think—I’m still on the ground rolling. If my ribs were made of more brittle tissue, I would have broken them by now, laughing that hard.

Part of what was so funny is the whole how-you-were-raised, that “manners” thing.

Say “please.” Answer with “thank you”.

“...plea...please”

“Thank you.”

Those comedians from my youth, the ones that taught me how to use the f word. The ones that weren’t comedians, but poets, the way they used profanity.

Right now my laughing rivals those moments in time when I heard those tapes.

It’s like I’m nine years old again, my buddy’s older brother is away and we snuck into his room to play the tapes.

Those jokes, to a nine-year-old, the profanity itself was twice as funny as the joke—

FUCKSHITDAMNDICKHEADPUSSYMOTHERFUCKERFART  
SHIT—

Nine-year-olds, hearing this comedy for the first time, rolling on the floor.

That’s me right now.

“Please—”

“THANKYOUFUCKSHITDAMNDICKHEADPUSSYMOTHER  
FUCKERFARTSHIT.”

Keep the comedy coming. That kid, from years ago, what’s he doing now? He moved away when we were twelve.

“I’m sorry you feel the way you do. But think of—”

Hey Egan, didn’t you tell that stripper with a kid that her kid and your kids would make great step-siblings, even if she was a complete skank? You called her infant daughter “skank child” just to see if she would still grind on you after you laid down a fifty-dollar bill.

Skank child?

“Please, think of my—”

Fuckstain: I *am* thinking of your kids.

Pointing out the stripper’s stretch marks, asking her if she was going to train her daughter to work the pole, or would she let some other filthy cunt teach her?

Then another fifty, and her grinding on you.

“Please—”

“THANK YOU FOR STINKING UP MY PLACE, FEAR-MONGER.”

“...please...”

“THANK YOU FOR DOUBT, FEAR, PANIC, UNCERTAINTY, MISERY, IGNORANCE, AND YOUR MANAGEMENT TOOLS, YOU INCOMPETENT. THAT WHOLE DEPARTMENT GOT THE AXE BECAUSE OF YOU.YOUR FUCKED-UP BONUS—”

“p...plea...pleeth...”

“THANK YOU FOR BLINDSIDING PAM SCHOBERLE AND JENNIFER SMYTHE BECAUSE THEY WOULDN’T FUCK YOU.YOU GOT OFF ON IT.YOU STUPID INSECURE ALL TERRIFIED, THANK YOU FOR GETTING SCHOBIE AND JEN RAIL-ROADED OUT.AND STEVIE AND MILLER AND SHARON FIRED, THEY WERE NATURAL LEADERS—PEOPLE LISTENED TO THEM—MENTORS HAD OUR BACKS.YOU STOMPEDSTOMPED INITIATIVE.YOU FUCKED OVER TWO WHOLE DEPART—YOU ARE A CORPORATE WELFARE CASE. EVERY PAYCHECK YOU TAKE HOME IS LIKE A FUCKING HANDOUT BECAUSE YOU GOT PAID EVEN THOUGH EVERYTHING YOU OVERSAW TURNED TO SHIT YOU GOT PROMOTED AND TOO STUPID SHIT-FOR-BRAINS TO HAVE EARNED EVERY PENNY YOU EVER EARNED ALL A FUCKING HANDOUT DO YOU EVEN THINK OF ALL THOSE THAT GOT LAID OFF INSECURE ENTITLED LITTLE—GOOD PEOPLE GOT THE AXE YOU GOT PROMOTED ASSHOLES LIKE YOU TALK ALL SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST BUT YOU’D LAST LIKE FIVE MINUTES IN THE WILD DROP THAT BULLSHIT ACT—”

Pain. My foot. Shit. Could’ve sworn I was wearing steel-toed flight boots.

I limp back to the front room. Couch time. If this were another point in time, I would tell myself that I need to work on my professionalism.

☆ ☆ ☆

Egan’s pretty far gone.

I laid down to rest and could have been sleeping for twenty minutes or twenty days, I don’t know.

How much presence of mind is still present in our friend Egan? Will he come to his senses and hate me?

I'd hate me. I'm being a dick right now. But he is still, when coherent, using his kids. His three burdens. And give him credit, he didn't sell the third to an A-rab or some Chink.

Get over yourself, Egan.

Dude, grow some balls. Revolt.

Those things you used to say about Connie, the receptionist, just because her husband was black. That hateful energy in your jokes, bring that viciousness now.

You thought you owned fear, only fear owned you. Just admit this. Then again, not admitting mistakes helped ruin our country. Why we are where we are in 2010.

Way to be patriotic, dude. That's why you advanced. And it's why you aren't much longer for this Earth.

I gotta run a quick errand, then it is best that we take care of this.

It will be kind of like a layoff. We make a clean break and move on.

As far as the wood chipper for disposal goes, it may be gruesome but you have to give me credit for my professionalism here. For the job it needs to do, it's quick and efficient. Again, this is a business decision.

Egan: you spent your whole life attempting to wield and manipulate that entity known as fear. You climbed the ladder on the back of that thing you called fear. Fear was your weapon. Fear smokescreened so many mistakes. Fear masked your ineptitude and the fact that your position of leadership was 100 percent unearned and you were a complete failure.

Fear, in the end, was man-handling you the entire time.

Yet you can't acknowledge this fact. Humble yourself a bit. You could be free now—with these kids who suddenly became so much more important now that you might be beaten to death—if you just leveled yourself.

A lot of what is being done here is taking your words, your language, your threats, and turning them into action.

This is called calling your bluff.

This could have ended much more positively.

You shit the bed.

### 3

**Egan**, thirty-ish-or-forty-maybe-fiftyish, of Denver, Colorado, died Saturday, February 23rd, 2010. He is survived by who knows. Obviously some kids because he wouldn't quit kvetching about those pint-sized burdens ruining his game with the strippers. His third daughter, yeah, he had this joke—you know, let's not revisit that foul idea he thought of as a joke. Yeah, that fearmonger EVP, who stifled initiative and screwed up whole departments then got promoted, was one of those douche-pricks who felt the need to reproduce, even though his offspring sucked away all his money. He is survived by all those who got laid off to cover his—here you go: he was like those platoon lieutenants in Vietnam who got fragged by their own soldiers for being incompetent. He'd be a frag magnet over there. Egan also left behind fear, doubt, uncertainty, ignorance, misery, and panic, with some dashes of ruthlessness, relentlessness, and remorselessness. He is survived by a decade that, in my opinion, might as well be called The I Don't Know Decade. Can you explain what happened? I didn't think so. Most likely Egan is survived by a parent or two. A brother and/or brothers and/or sister and/or sisters, probably, right? Maybe his grand-folks are still alive. But they're probably real old and gum little glass bowls of custard. We're digressing...he is also survived by

a wife—whom he rarely mentioned as he was chained to the wall in his final days of life. Insensitive dick. Manners? Hello? Using your kids to try and guilt-trip me, and never once using your wife to try and guilt-trip me into not killing you? Serious dick move, dude. You demeaned her in life, yet couldn't even mention her in those final days of your life? At least buy her flowers or someth—oh yeah, you're dead. I'm such an amateurish obituary writer. Your wife was pregnant with your second kid while you had that affair with that bimbo Admin. The one they fired after finding out about you two. Supposedly this was all bad for company morale, but you didn't get fired. Hmmm. And you didn't even have the decency to mention this wife in those moments before I beat you to death with a hammer? Serious, dude—you are one serious dick. Chances are his wife will survive. I can't really remember her, but I'm betting she'll meet some other guy, and those kids will turn out all right. Maybe some new guy will come along that—me? What? Any chick that would, with that guy—are you serious? Really? Dude, bleccch. What else? Egan is survived by his SUV and that cockamamie dickhead bike he rode to work on Fridays. You. A biker. Really? If you could still look at yourself, you would need to take a long look at yourself. A biker? Really? Oh yeah, we can't forget those legions of harassed waitresses, strippers, retail saleswomen. And he's also survived by those other higher-ups. Hopefully at least some of this group saw through his disgusting, Great Recession-causing horseshit and just humored him or whatever. They gotta look out for the status quo. But if this entire group saw him but didn't see through him, what does this say about our world? Maybe that's the state of business, why America is spiraling downward. I'm answering my own question. Services will be held at Our Lady of The Lady Who Birthed Jesus, The Kicker Of Non-Believin' Heathen Ass. So it is, and so it shall be. Holy Moly chicken mole, or Holy canoli is my shoulder sore. Whatever those men in the black robes say. And then they wave their hand around in the air and light incense

and everyone screams “Hiphiphooray!” or “Hallelujah!” at the top of their lungs then the whole group fist pounds or something. I should really call a doctor and see if they can look at my sore shoulder on such short notice.

# 4

“Doc, thanks for seeing me and looking at my sore shoulder on such short notice.”

“Well, since I’ve been disbarred I have a lot of time on my hands—”

“Disbarred? You’re a doctor, not a lawyer—”

“Yes. I know. Son, I am such an awful doctor that all the lawyers banded together and preemptively had me disbarred in order to stop me from even thinking of switching to law.”

“And you have no problem with the fact that I beat Egan to death with a hammer, then got rid of his body using a wood chipper?”

“These are tough times we’re in. Besides, I heard that Egan guy was a productivity-killing, micro-managing, incompetent prick. Now let’s look at that shoulder. Hmm. Before this hammer death beating, did you stretch?”

“Oh yes, Doc. I put in my yoga DVD and did the entire ‘Stretch’ section. Even jumped rope.”

“That’s odd. And as you were doing this, you’re positive that an out-of-work builder or dot-bomber or Karl Rove didn’t swoop in from the sky on an oversized black crow and beat you with a blunt object?”

“Very positive.”

“And you’re sure this Egan person is dead, after you threw his body parts into that wood chipper and all? It would be nice to ask him questions—”

“I beat Egan to death with a tack hamm—”

“Did you say a ‘tack’ hammer?”

“Well, yeah...”

“There you go! It’s your rotator cuff, or possibly a pectoralis major tendon inflammation, because you’re clueless about hammer weight and size. A *tack* hammer? You know what we medical professionals HATE? When people engage in some type of physical exertion without consulting a medical professional first! How many swings?”

“Gosh, Doc. I don’t kn—”

“‘I don’t know’ is not acceptable. Was it around thirty?”

“More, I think.”

“Good God, man! How hard were you swinging?”

“Pretty hard, I guess.”

“BuullllllSHIT, fucko. You *know* how hard you were swinging. Level with me.”

“I gave it maybe ninety-eight percent—”

“Son, that was a brainfart of a hammer choice.”

“It was on sale. I even picked it up in the store and yelled, ‘HEY, IT WOULD BE AWESOME TO KILL EGAN WITH THIS.’ I got a few thumbs-ups. Maybe the other customers were just thinking about gas prices or their dwindling retirement.”

“Here’s my advice: next time, buy a thirteen-ounce Light Duty hammer. Swings well. Gauging your size and body type, it should take you fifteen solid swings, maybe twenty. All landed in the right places, of course.”

“A thirteen-ounce Light Duty. Hmmm—”

“Yup. But to tell you the truth, more I look at your shoulder, the more—raise your elbow, like this. Wait a minute. You’ve been shoveling bullshit, piles of bullshit, spinning your wheels, digging holes then filling them, reinventing the wheel—you’re a member of the American workforce in the year 2010, aren’t you, son?”

“Well, Doc, I’ve been through a bunch of layoffs and restructurings and the world is going crazy, if that’s what you mean—”

“Yup, I knew it. You’ve been mainlining fear, doubt, panic, uncertainty, misery, and ignorance. The bullshittendonitis gave it away. No wonder you murdered that talentless/pointless executive. Your uncertainty—well, you’re an Unpaid Overtimer, someone who just hurtled through that ignorance-riddled I Don’t Know Decade. The Fear Index, The Misery

Index, both through the roof. Your levels of apprehensiveness regarding job security, last decade it got to the point where it became Job Suck-Curity, the IDK Decade brand of job security. I bet you regularly receive e-mails full of those silly little doubt-inducing ellipses points, ‘...’—”

“Every day, Doc, in pretty much every e-mail now. It’s to the point where people can’t even have electronic conversations anymore without those causing people to second-guess everything. Like...this...”

“*The Portland Manual of Style* states, ‘ellipsis points, or ellipses, indicate hesitation or a broken sentence, often associated with and meant to hint at doubt, insecurity, unsure feelings, and uncertainty.’”

“Doubt...Insecurity...Unsure Feelings...Uncertainty...I worked for legions of people who turned these into managerial tools. Egan and all those underlings that followed him were pros at using those. They even now come across in people’s voices—”

“Yes, son! For instance, when a supervisor says, ‘We should have a chat,’ I bet it now comes across infused with subtle undertones, you hear those ellipses when they speak. It’s ‘we...should...have a chat...’ or ‘you don’t seem to be happy to work here...’ ‘Is there a problem?’ becomes ‘Is...there...a problem...?’ They actually teach that delivery in business schools nowadays. Those ellipses...I think of them as verbal sniper bullets for chickenshits. *Dot!-dot!-dot!s*. See, back in my day, the regular mail day, one would never end correspondence with those doubt-inducing dotdotdots, ‘...’ You talked through the point you wanted to make—But enough about me, here, this is about you. Son, I bet you’re so panic-filled day in, day out that you’re quite adept at dancing The Shit-Fucking Dance.”

“The Shit-Fucking Dance?”

“Watch: Look at me! I fuck shit! Look at me! I fuck shit!”

“Good God, Doc, you just transformed into every person in my company during those months before the twenty-five percent layoff!”

“And watch this: Look! At! Me! !! Fuck! Shit! IFuckShitIFuckShit! Lookatme Lookatme Lookatme! Ifuckshit Ifuckshit Ifuckshit!”

“Doc: you *BECAME* the stressed-out, overworked, kept-in-the-dark-and-scared-for-their-jobs, Y2K-infected barbarian sex cannibal American workforce—just now!”

“And: LookatmelfuckshitIfuckshitIfuckshitlookatmelookatmelookat me—”

“Doc, watching you spin around like that I just had a flashback of watching every manager and assistant manager I worked for in the previous decade standing in front of me and trying to explain what needed to be accomplished—”

“Son, around roughly June of 2009, the workforce broke down to the point where you all just began to repeat ‘look at me I fuck shit’ and dance that productivity-killing, continually-changing—”

“You mean we’ve been pants-shittily running around in circles like chickens with our heads off?”

“Son, don’t insult those who pants-shittily run around in circles like chickens with their heads cut off. They have their shit together compared to the current American workforce. Those Unpaid Overtimers, dancing that logic-defying, profit-margin-destroying dance. One minute the dance steps are one-TWO-three-four, the next they’re ONE-three-four-two, then that new VP starts and they’re SEVEN-thirteen-NINE-four. You’ve been dancing The Shit-Fucking Dance instead of actually digging yourselves out of the economic crisis.”

“Doc! The other day, a coworker said to me, ‘Look at me! I fuck shit!’ I dismissed it, I just assumed she wanted me to look at her because she was fucking shit or something, I didn’t know it was this!”

“Son, that dance is the degeneration of workflow, those inefficient, ever-changing array of dance steps you all constantly dance due to lack of foresight, short-term vs. long-term thinking, mindlessly embracing the status quo. Each company technology upgrade, those microwave cell phones popping popcorn and emailing faxes of half-baked ideas, these socially-mediated upgrades sending each foot dancing off in opposite directions—some of you go crazy, even growing new feet to keep up and incorporate everything into the workflow process. The Shit-Fucking Dance exploded on the workplace scene when people’s level of sensory overload and stress got so out of hand that they danced and stumbled around the office like panicky little zombie-toddlers, all hopped up on fear.”

“Yes! Doc, I get it. When you just did those confusing dance steps it was like I had a PTSD-style flashback—”

“Son, don’t disgrace our men and women in uniform by comparing their noble plight to The Shit-Fucking Dance. Show some respect. The out-of-control fearmongering during the I Don’t Know Decade, our

service people are better than that. The Shit-Fucking Dance happened because leadership wasn’t doing its job.”

“You’re right, Doc, that was wrong of me. But when you started dancing those steps, gosh, it was like I was transported back to work—”

“Son, during the last decade the rise in the levels of ignorance, fear and uncertainty, the doubt, the panic and misery, the ruthlessness, relentlessness and remorselessness, they’ve changed all of us.”

“I’m with you there. Do you think the world’s preoccupation with fear could have started during those final years of the previous decade, stemming from our preoccupation with Y2K? Like our fixation on the end of civilization and the dates in our computers? Our focus on fear ten years later, maybe these are intertwined?”

“That’s an interesting hypothesis, son. You know, a patient of mine was in fact victim number one of the Third Millennium, the very first person to die after we all crossed over. Y2K-related, an older fella, in his seventies. He was with his wife over at some friends’ house, older couples who never stay up late. Anyway, five, four, three, two, one, HAPPY NEW MILLENNIUM. Then the light starts to flicker. Turns out the host was going to get that light switch looked at the week before, but forgot. My patient assumed the worst, of course, and was dead from a heart attack/brain aneurism just seven seconds into the Millennium.”

“Sorry for snickering, Doc, that all just seems so funny now.”

“Funny now? Try ten years ago. I accidentally burst out laughing when I sat down with his wife and heard the full story, just after it happened. It’s a good thing you can now trade options on The Volatility Index, or Fear Index, or else I’d never make money these days. Did you know that starting February 24, 2006, you could buy Fear futures—a ‘call’ order if you’re thinking more fear, and ‘put’ order if you’re predicting less fear? VIX Options Contracts—”

“Making money on fear and people’s outlook related to fear. Really?”

“Sure can, son. There’s a Fear Index *and* a Misery Index. Capitalize on all that negativity out there. Implied volatility, git some. We don’t make products. We make math formulas and call them products.”

“Interesting perspective, Doc.”

“For trading, I even got me a special double-sided policeman-style shoulder holster. Where the pistols normally go, I fill up the right side



with a bunch of Fear Indexes, the left side up with a bunch of Misery Indexes—they're squirmy little fellers—then I throw on my black leather trenchcoat, oversized orange foam cowboy hat, and GIMME HEAD 'TIL I'M DEAD medallion. And I get to trading. That sinister guy over there's looking for a Misery Index, I reach inside the coat, double-pump, grab a Misery Index and fling it, WHAMMO—”

“What's interesting about all of this, Doc, is that I'm feeling that I should have reached out to a medical professional like yourself much earlier. Egan might be alive today.”

“That's psychiatry, son. I'd offer my thoughts but I'm banned from practicing psychiatry, along with law and culinary arts. Your shoulder looks good, though. Now if you'll excuse me I'm going to go change into a baby diaper and bib and astronaut helmet and snort Mount Fujis of coke off my nurse's breasts. That nurse of mine loves Internet candid animal videos. Do you? Have you seen the one where the penguins invent the waste-free fusion reactor? Silly penguins. My receptionist has your paperwork up front, make sure everything is correct. Insurance companies are all pants-shitty about Obamacare.”

## 5

Egan is in the lake. Fish food.

Been a while now.

Looked The Fear Index up. Doc was right.

The Fear Index trades on the idea of implied volatility. And when stocks go higher, the VIX goes lower.

Volatility. Implied.

Something else, every site I looked at said the same thing: the VIX has no *intrinsic* value. By itself, it's not worth anything at all.

Think about its commoditization during The I Don't Know Decade: creating trading options based on fear during a ten-year span that saw this same concept—fear—mutate and become more pervasive.

Add to this: IDK, that decade. Its foundation was laid by Y2K. Not only did the year 2000 begin the decade, but that potentially-civilization-ending technology glitch called Y2K laid the foundation for ten years where fear, doubt, ignorance, uncertainty, panic, and misery moved into our lives and said “We're taking over.”

Implied volatility. With no intrinsic value. The Fear Index.

I may be on to something here.

Egan was an all-consuming project for so long, then I was going to end it all. Now I can't, so now thoughts of being caught, a new set of problems—and this new train of thought, The I Don't Know Decade, The Fear Index, Y2K, my overdue doctor's visit.

This whole adventure was meant to quiet everything, not amplify.

Instead, you are here, certain that The Fear Index is probably rising, implying volatility.

“Hey World! This is The Fear Index, implying that things *might* be volatile.”

You are here, looking through a giant stack of mail that you would rather light on fire. Or just leave in a pile on the front porch so it doesn't take up space inside, but the neighbors might wonder.

These pieces of mail say things like Uncle Dave's surgery went okay, there's a sale on garden shears, one in six people are mentally ill, a sixteen-inch two-topping is just \$10.99—

Back the truck up.

“One in six are mentally ill”? The fuck you get off sending literature to this address stating the Universe contains this phenomena called “mental illness”?

Hey, you Mental Illness Is Bad And Pants-Shitty people: about twelve years ago, you could have mailed me something.

Take this address off your mailing list.

Take a deep breath, you are here.

Still not quite knowing what to do with those sensations and visions of washing another person's blood off your body.

Near the end, his left eye gone. The right still there, eyelid no longer able to blink.

Human bones crack louder than chicken bones.

Blood.

Full-on terror, entitled smirk leaving his face forever.

Hammer connecting with Egan's temple. The rigid, then the soft part.

Egan in pain. He looked so out of his element.

Doc's insight, this tack hammer being too light.

When he started to scream, such a different sound.

Wasn't anticipating that, or the pain. Swinging that way-too-light hammer with everything you had, kicking, stomping though you were in running shoes not steel-toed flight boots.

Running behind schedule. Then getting back on schedule.

Out by the lake. The wood chipper. The Axeman showed up, suicide left.

Then.

And you are here. Now.

Which isn't then. Back then.

When you weren't as old as you are now.

No, not Egan's death. Let's go much farther back.

That bar, December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1999. 11:59:02.

Back then, waiting for that coke dealer. (Sketchy yet necessary bunch, coke dealers.) Fifty-eight seconds from Y2K.

Waiting for the clock to strike, for the explosions to begin.

Fifty-eight seconds from now, forget HAPPY NEW YEAR. We're talking HAPPY NEW MILLENNIUM—only every electric light might die, you're thinking. Then you're thinking that the coke dealer is late.

In the final minute of the entire millennium, when we all should be elated, starry-eyed to be alive on Podunk Planet Earth at this moment, Y2K and Fear's cone-shaped New Year's Eve party hat are the tempering forces.

Hey everybody! Let's say goodbye to a thousand years and welcome in a thousand brand new ones, apprehensively!

Because our computers didn't understand the concept of millennia and centuries, due to the omission of these two digits, there was a chance we might not cross over.

Y2K. Potentially shutting down electrical plants—no, the very concept of electricity itself. Goodbye hopes, dreams, worth. And once we devour all the prepared food and sodas in the walk-in refrigerators and storage pantries, those secret recipes that corporations guard with their lives will be gone forever.

The omission of two digits in a year of a line of computer code might trigger an outbreak of Y2K Innards-Falling-Out Syndrome, for all we knew.

Another scenario: the ball dropping in Times Square could release Y2K radiation. This was a government/corporation thing. Maybe this secretly-implanted radiation would infect us, turning all of us into those hordes of Y2K-infected barbarian sex cannibals.

Or maybe the Y2K fire-breathing flying brontosaurus would swoop in, incinerating every human being on Earth by January 4, 2000.

Who knew what was in store for us on the other side?

Who knows? This sparkling new canvas called The New Millennium is blank right now, at this moment in 1999.

And here's something to make you take a step back: all the potential disasters we were thinking about back then, we weren't thinking about planes flying into buildings.

And I don't know about you, but I couldn't fathom that concept back then. We were here.

About 85 percent starry-eyed to be alive at this moment in time. And 15 percent apprehensive.

Was it the Y2K bug, the computer glitch that was terrifying? Or was it the sheer unknown, The Third Millennium, diluted down into this anomaly, The Millennium Bug? Maybe Y2K threw us off course.

To put this another way: how much more starry-eyed would we all have been at this moment: December 31, 1999, 11:59:59 to January 1, 2000, 12:00:01, if it weren't for Y2K?

And this whole Y2K industry, spawned in those last few years of The Second Millennium. Well-paying, yet short-lived.

Fear is the trump card. The Millennium is coming. Fear monetized "I don't know" in telling us we don't know what is on the other side. "I don't know" became authoritative.

Insight, character, real leadership, these took a back seat. Traits in men like Egan, these were needed in this decade.

I bet you didn't know that our nation's military academies—Annapolis, West Point, Colorado Springs, New London—outlawed "I don't know."

At these places, "I'll find out" is the correct way to say "I don't know."

During an international crisis, would you want your military leaders' answer to be "I don't know" or "I'll find out"?

The First Decade of The Third Millennium killed I'll Find Out.

In The Information Age, it's all about fear and ignorance.

What caused The Great Recession? I don't know.

Fear, dressed in a grey suit and yellow tie, turns to the camera from behind the news desk and in that oh-so-newslike-voice says, "The Fear Index is holding steady. Volatility is implied. Stay tuned." No. "Stay... tuned..."

This isn't just another New Year's Eve.

The very nanosecond we crossed from one millennium to another, this was A New Nanosecond of A New Millisecond of A New Second

of A New Minute of A New Day of A New Week of A New Month of A New Year of A New Decade of A New Century of A New Millennium.

Fear was offering to buy the crew the next round of shots. If the ability to buy shots still exists in a few seconds...

Or maybe you were drunk *and* high. Your dealer came through. Know what? Fuuuuuck you.

Waking up that next morning, on your buddy's laundry room cement floor. The First Morning of The First Day of The First Century of The Third Millennium.

Rolling over, knee hitting the dryer. You are here—no—you're *still* here. On this Earth.

For now...

Pulling all funds out of those financial institutions two days before, them trying to talk you out of it. But the looks in the employees' eyes told you they pulled their money out, too.

Now from your buddy's floor, looking around at the world.

Getting your bearings, setting the X- and Y-axis for this new millennium.

A few months from now, could be huddling in some drainage ditch, humming "Auld Lang Syne" in fits of half-sanity to keep spirits high. Raising an imaginary plastic champagne glass, hugging the vision of those friends as you all dine on raw rat meat.

Rawratmeat. Yumyumyum.

Those friends who got eaten by that crazed horde of Y2K-infected barbarian sex cannibals after the horde tired of having their way with them.

This decade, you didn't know so much about it back then. Not like you know now, now that you're older.

You didn't yet know any of those things that happened during those ten years that spurred you to name this decade The I Don't Know Decade.

Though you did know that the coke dealer didn't show up that previous night.

Fear bought a lot of rounds of shots, you knew that, too.

The Fear Index, you might have known what that was, don't remember. It wasn't optioned back then, so no way you could have known that people would one day speculate on futures of fear.

Egan? He was just some rising star back then. This was maybe when he got Stevie ran out, then got promoted.

Stevie was the quietest person in the room, who would open his mouth for like two sentences in the middle of a discussion and *floor* the room with insight. An angle, a perspective on the issue that would open up new avenues. Sharon was like that, too, only not as quiet as Stevie.

People like that made talentless corporate suck-ups like Egan shit. And Sharon, being both more talkative than Stevie *and* female, that creates whole new dimensions of negativity with guys like Egan.

Back to this moment, 1/1/00: the crazy thing is, with everything Y2K was bringing, all the potential scenarios for destruction, airliners were still just airliners back then. They took off and landed. That was it. It was a great idea to buy a house back then. Layoffs didn't happen back then like they do now.

New Orleans, Florida, islands in The Indian Ocean, they were different back then. Family members were alive back then.

We weren't involved in two different wars back then.

Our men and women in uniform weren't being wounded and killed on a daily basis back then.

You didn't read the word "fear" in the news as much as you do now back then.

Implied volatility. Y2K.

Know what? Time to say it. One of us has to.

Thanks, granddads and great-granddads. Thanks a lot.

Y2K: that whole "inputting the whole year" thing was really hard, wasn't it?

"Gee, which would be better to put in for the date on these machines: two numbers or four?"

"Duuuh, I don't know."

Dumbshit jack-nozzles.

One more time: how much more starry-eyed would we all have been if it weren't for Y2K?

## 6

Each day the economic news only gets worse. Even if it improves, it still feels like it's getting worse. If not, somebody discovers the angle that makes it worse.

That negativity, guys like Egan turned that into a managerial tool.

Egan.

Egan is in the lake, how many days now? Fish food.

Well, Egan *was* fish food.

Then fish shit. Fish *do* shit, right?

Egan, fish food. Egan fish food.

The Egan brand of fish food. Egan Fish Food™.

Package up that name, and actually put it to work, real work. Not that idiotic mutation of the school playground politics disguised as work that carried that guy through his life.

Egan Fish Food™. Registration mark pending.

Tap into the climate, that vibe in the air.

Egan Fish Food™ would be punishment food. Keep-fish-in-line food. Intimidating fish food. Bring-out-the-worst-in-fish fish food. Keep-them-on-their—wait, fish don't have toes.

Destroy-spirit-and-hope-and-ambition food.

Fish pee on the carpet again? Egan Fish Food™! Wait, fish don't pee on carpets.

Egan Fish Food™ gets fish back in line quicker than a cattle prod.

Fish will fear Egan Fish Food™.



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