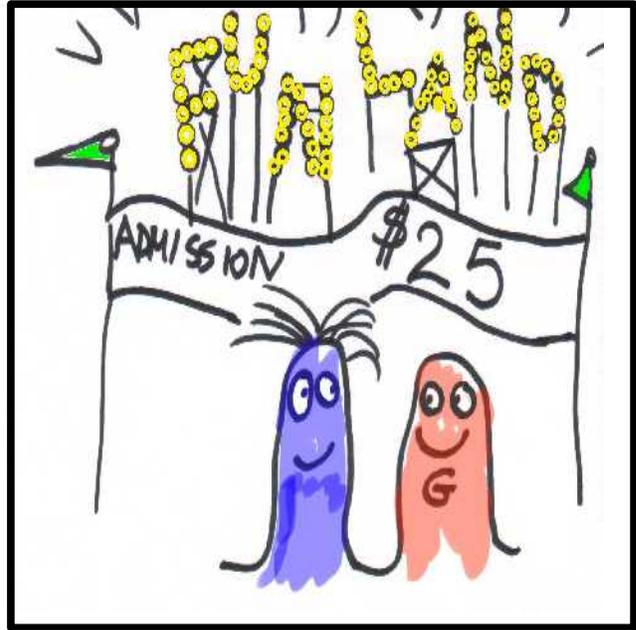


I'll Never Understand the Point to Amusement Parks!

City landscapes almost always include one amusement park. Whether it's Canada's Wonderland north of Toronto, the monstrosity at the West Edmonton Mall or Montreal's La Ronde on Ile Ste. Helene, amusement parks are a part of modern city life. These are established institutions whose annual reopening is something to be eagerly anticipated by one and all. While I don't necessarily understand why that is, I do recognize that a lot of people enjoy amusement parks; that's why they're called amusement parks and not, say, work, prison or school.



That's not what I'm talking about here.

I'm talking about those ever-so temporary set-ups in shopping mall parking lots nation wide. We even had one set up here at our local big box mall. I could tell people were getting excited because every time I would go to any of the stores at the mall, I saw clusters of people, young and old clamouring for a look at the clapboard concession stands or the engineering feat known as the Ferris wheel. Yet, for some of us who know better, the re-emergence of these parking lot nightmares is not a good thing.

It starts with someone thinking it would be a lot of fun to go to one of these terror camps in a parking lot. The absurdly high admission rate of \$25/person is temporarily ignored – temporarily.

In high spirits, you pay your money and then drift inside the park. You understand that you will still have to fork out more money for tickets to go on rides. You don't want to just leap onto the rides right away, though. You want to get in the mood, to brighten your spirits even more and to help you forget about the fact that you've already spent about a week's worth of groceries just to get in the gate and you have nothing to show for it. First, you want to just try your hand at one of those dumb gallery type games thinking you won't win anything more than a plastic flute or a couple of fridge magnets.



That's not what happens.

Because you, I dunno, smiled at the poor sap who's working the gallery, he or she decides that no matter how lousy a shot you are, you will win the big prize. That means, unfortunately for you, that you wind up with this enormous stuffed monkey that you must now drag around the place with you. There is no place to store this polyester covered mutant so you have to carry it with you on every ride. But you manage to make the best of things and so decide to get a bite to

eat.

These parking lot amusement parks always have concession stands. They are excruciatingly expensive, sell high fat, salt laden carcinogens in a bun, high sugar tooth rotting carbonated pop, multicoloured, tooth shattering candy or else explosive clouds of red dye #4 infused cotton candy. You cannot get out of these concession stands without spending at least \$25...each... Ambulances are standing by...

You've now had something to eat, conveniently forgetting about such sundry things as nutrition, diabetes or even your developing heart condition. Now, it's time for the rides. It's also time to pay out more money for tickets to get on the rides in the first place.

Now you're feeling the financial pinch. You've already spent a fortune just to get into the park and for a bite to eat and all you've got to show for your efforts is a stuffed monkey you can't do anything about except take with you on each of these rides. In an attempt to soften the hardening realization that this may not have been a good idea after all, you name your polyester stuffed something or other Conrad.

So, you try to be smart about the rides you want to go on. You look for the rides that have the longest line since anything else is probably lame and consists of a small nudge in a giant fibreglass strawberry. No, you want not just a great ride but an awesome epic ride so you join the hugely long lineup at something called the 'F-5'. So, there you two are, standing in this thick line up with only a stuffed animal to lean onto since all you can do is stand and creep along...heading for what you think will be the funnest most awesome ride ever!



You bring Conrad, because you have to and decide that he will have at least as much fun as you will. He's a member of your beloved family now. As much as you loathe standing in a long line that seems to be moving at the amazing speed of a glacier, you are heartened by the fact that there are now others who are standing in line behind you. Some of them even have their own frighteningly large stuffed animal. You can all relate to each other – at least in that regard.

This, however, is what actually happens on the 'F-5' ride and your first experience of disillusionment is as heartbreaking as it is inevitable.

As you approach this first ride you gaze upon its largesse, its dynamics – its very, well, aliveness. The twinkling lights are like compound eyes you see on houseflies, the dangly bits the very limbs of this sentient being whose body you are about to experience. You also learn that this...this...object has a temper and, frankly, doesn't like these strange little beings climbing into it. Know how you feel when you're being swarmed by mosquitoes? Well, so does this thing and will spare no pains to let you know how it feels about hosting all you little SOBs.

So, you now get closer and can see – and hear – for yourself just how terrifying this ride promises to be. But, you're not scared; in fact, you lovingly anticipate this awesome...thing...

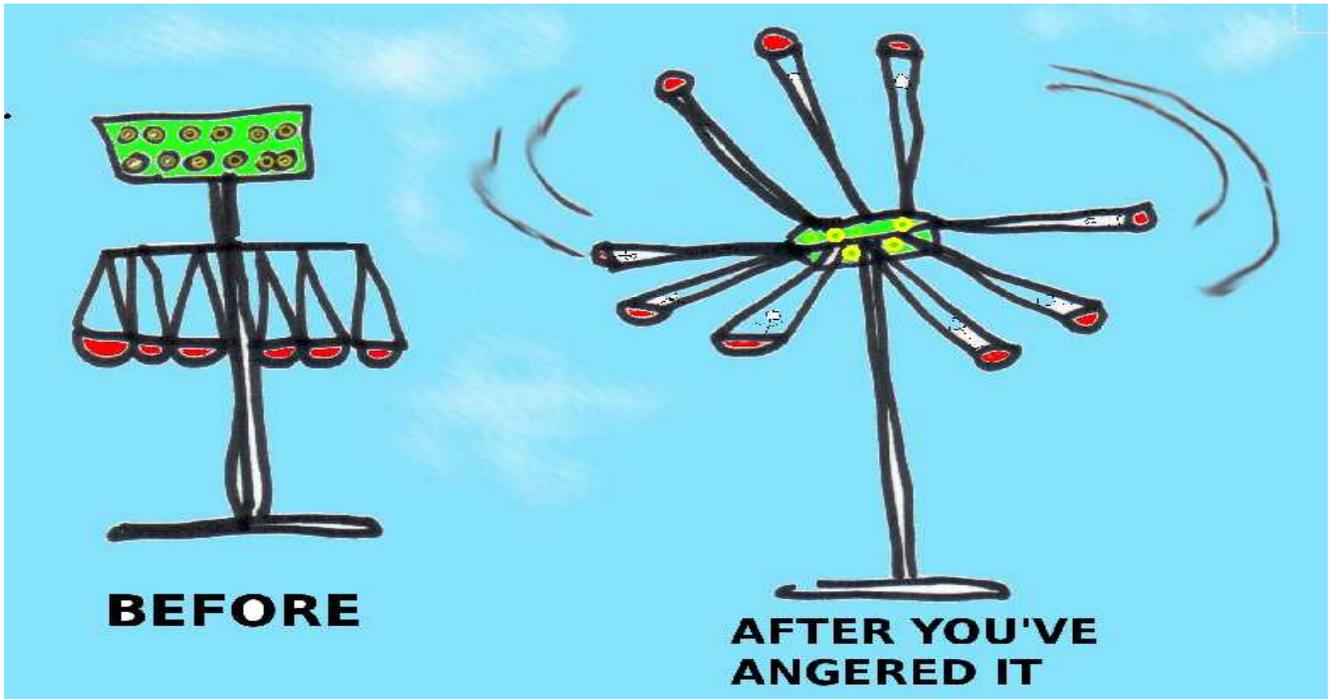
It doesn't occur to you to think that climbing onto a mechanical swing and being swung around like a shotput or a boulder in a creaky sling may not be such a great idea.

You've paid your money.

You bought your tickets and, dagnabit, you're going to have a good time whether anyone else likes it or not!

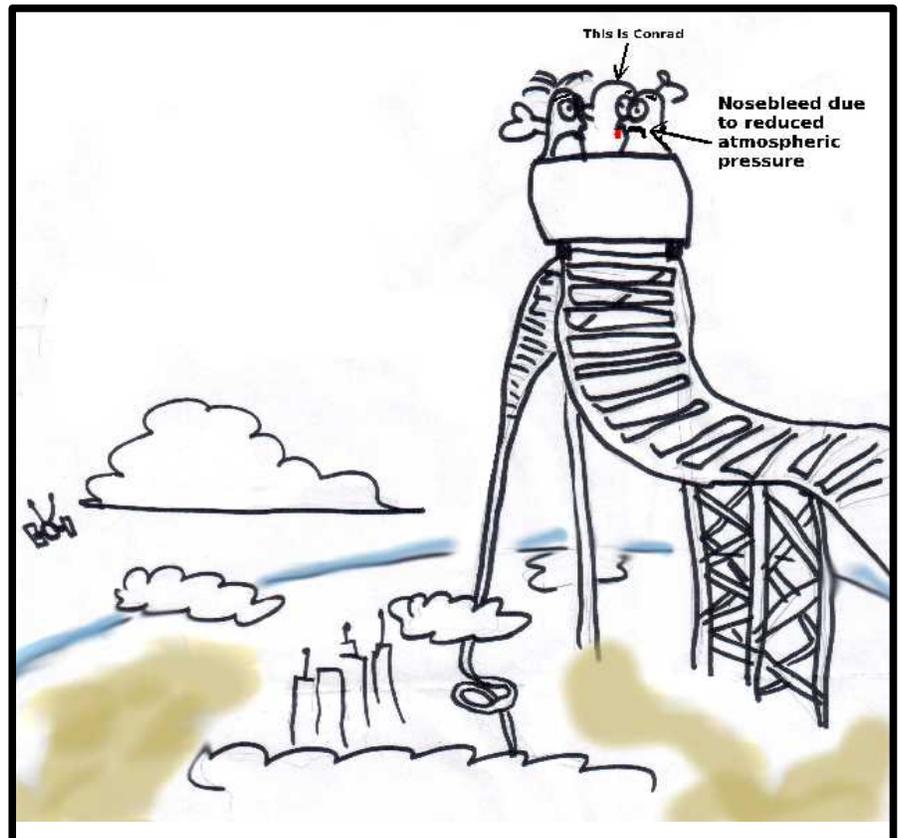
Having survived all that, you feel quite prepared to take on what looks like the tallest, biggest roller coaster this side of the kuiper belt. However, what you think you're going to experiencing as you stupidly line up for a ride on the 'Psycho train' bears little resemblance to what you're actually going to experience. You foolishly ignore the option of donning a pressure suit and are quite happily prepared to step into a fibreglass and metallic car of

questionable mechanical soundness. Blithely do you strap yourself into the seat. Then, some poor, barely trained sap will gurgle something incomprehensible into the microphone such that the only words you can sort of discern include 'for your safety' and 'have a good ride'. You have no clue what will befall you but you don't care...you came here to have a good time, dammit!



Now, after some unseen engine-like object makes a few last heaving gasps, you lurch away from the platform. The ground, safety, your very life are but a dwindling point far behind you.

So, you're on the 'Psycho train'. You're zooming away from the safety of the ground and are surely headed straight up to some unseen point above. Convinced you are going to pass through low Earth orbit, you are now beginning to regret not



having squeezed yourself into a pressure suit.

It's only after you get off the ride and start walking, wobbly legged and terrified, do you pass a sign that says something like "Internal Organs may have Shifted during your awesome fantastic ride. Don't worry, they'll go back to normal."...

...which they do, but only after this takes place...



So, now, after you've spent a fortune on admission, tickets to go on rides that spin, whirl and effectively dissect you and after having eaten stuff that was never meant to be consumed by humans the lesson learned is...

...you are a stupid retarded idiot for spending all your money just so you can embarrass yourself by barfing publicly. You can stay at home and vomit for free...you moron!