

# A War Baby Prepares to Be a War Old Man

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The earth is seething with invisible entities. We are all blind & deaf, we cannot even catch their odors as our dogs can do. I have never believed there are 'names' for these beings, only musical signatures. There are the perverse ones & the comely. Those that snip at the threads of the logical world, those that fill one's head with longings. There are viruses of conscience and algae of the ancestors. They exist in such profusion that Leeuwenhoek would leap to his feet astounded and frightened if he lived today, and made the appropriate lens. Some folk in every age and place have had glimpses and called them names. Some have built religions on these glimpses, some have mistaken their appearances in dream as their true appearances. We have said they are imps, dryads, elves, genii, angels, demons, Satans, ladies of the Lake. They are ghosts & saints & Olympian deities. Boggarts & dragons, pixies & visitors from stars. The dance of energies is infinite and teeming and impossible for us to comprehend, let alone to accurately name and interpret. The billions of plants & animals that we can see are themselves humming with consciousness that we rarely perceive in its fully blazing potency. The ancients left this perception embedded in their great story-cycles of the Animal spirits, Coyote, Raven, Spider & Dolphin....But those are stories. A living raven on a fencepost staring at you, that's an other thing.

What do you suppose happens when we bulldoze a hundred acres of pristine meadowland? What might have happened in the buzzing web of beings that inhabited western Russia in 1944 as the millions fought to the death with industrial devastation? If the web of visible beings & that of the invisible could be seen as, for example, we see the surface of Jupiter or Saturn, a whirling eddying stupendous gamelan orchestra of colors .....what will it look like in the zone we call Baghdad when the Imperial megadeath descends in its fury? In those riverine plains where human beings made their first towns, and then made them anew on top of the old, over & over & over again, thousands of years of ancestral spirits and all the energies that orbit human cultures....Bombs on the Tigris, bombs on the Euphrates, bombs on the Cities of Sinbad and Gilgamesh. These creatures come to us in dreams, in disguise; as people, as children, as ancient deer-women, begging us to desist, to do something, to avert this disaster. They know what we don't ever know; that the black holes we make spread throughout the web, that it takes epochs to mend, and that there are some chasms from which there is no climbing back out.

Narrow your focus to the human dimension for a moment & consider: The Khmer people were a great and delicate civilization a thousand years ago. Then came a period of warfare with rival kingdoms until they were smashed up and reduced to villagers again with vine-covered uninhabited citadels. Dozens of generations went past until a stable, chastened culture evolved that was distinguished by its subtlety and gentility. Things of great beauty & depth were commonplace in their clothing and dance and custom. They were at peace.

Now imagine the era of the European colonial empires, the conquest by the French, the brutal military suppression of Cambodia...and another period comes when the Americans are dropping huge numbers of bombs on the land, when the Prince is chased away, when poverty and carnage are

the everyday reality. Now comes the horror that no one could look in the face, the monster-regime of Pol Pot. We know what happened. But think now of how many generations again the Cambodian people are sentenced to, as they try to get over the wounds and hatred and shattered way of life. What does it take each time a huge war happens... to "get over it"? People in Serbia remember their defeat by the Ottoman Turks in the 14th Century. It was possible in 1990 for a demagogue to raise that banner again and incite people to war to revenge themselves for their defeat of 1389. And even when a culture seems truly to have set themselves on a path of conscious atonement and have even legislated themselves away from warfare, like that of Japan...how many generations still to come before the psychological inheritance of brutality & mindless discipline and sexual fascination with destruction will disappear from that people? If they are left alone to continue the effort? How many generations in South Africa before a Zulu person will look with complete benevolence on a Boer person? How long before the children of US Veterans of the war in Vietnam are free of the demons their fathers became host to? Three generations? More like Seven.... If we are allowed to keep doing this work. If there is not another war in Southeast Asia forcing Cambodians to run for cover again. If there is not an invasion of Iraq in which the grown children of veterans are Delta-force killing machines lobbing grenades into homes.

If we can see the rip in the web of love & domesticity & art that any of these wars have caused amongst us, imagine that same exterminating warp in the fabric of all the plant & animal & yes invisible symphonies of life. How much pounding can this noosphere take, after all? Is it not something like the "natural resources," the oil, ore, clean water, arable land? It is not inexhaustible. Nor are we, numerous as we are. Our webs can be shattered in ways that there is not time enough to heal. At some point the viruses may decide we aren't worth the trouble.

I was born in the War that killed 75 million human beings and left whole regions of the planet a smoking charnel-house. For five years afterward, there was an earnest conscious rhetoric, crystallized in the United Nations, that imagined an end to all wars, a universal disarmament. Steadily since then, decade after decade, the great powers have fought and escalated their bellicosity until now there is one supreme military empire and no diplomat ever speaks of disarmament or peace. And I prepare to enter my retirement and old age as a bystander to yet another war. And face the humiliation of handing over the prospect of Life to grandchildren whose childhood will be surrounded by the pornography of military culture. A childhood during which none of the pixies or genii will be able to reach her through the cacophony of Imperial Loud Speakers. She'll have to be taught to lie low.

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