

I recently had to take a business trip across country, (Portland by way of San Francisco). I've decided to recount my journey for your entertainment. All of what you read is true...except for the many parts that aren't.

## Chapter I: The Beginning

The alarm rings at 5 AM and I crawl out of bed, wondering again why I need to wake up at dawn on a Tuesday for meetings that don't start for another day. Why can't the airlines can't get their act together and get me to Portland without connecting flights and 12 hours of travel time? I mean, this is 20-freakin'-12! Where are the flying cars, the supersonic flights, the teleportation pods? At this point, I'd be willing to risk turning into some sort of monstrous Jim/Fly hybrid if it means I can sleep for two more hours.



Here's me and Geena just hangin'...we go way back

I manage to get out the door with minimal amount of whining with my wife and middle-baby in tow, and we head off to Philadelphia International Airport in pre-rush hour traffic. We approach the airport and I'm confronted with my usual dilemma...Do I want the "arriving" lanes because I'm arriving at the airport, or the "departing" lanes, because my plane is departing. I know – stupid – but please don't ask me to explain how my brain works...it's a chaotic and scary place sometimes.

This time, I correctly choose departing. I pull up to the gate, kiss the wife and middle-baby goodbye, and it's off to security. While waiting, I reflect – as I usually do when I fly– on how silly we all look, emptying our pockets, pulling off our shoes and belts, handing over our bags of travel-sized shampoo. I understand the necessity of all this, I really do; and I hate to say "the terrorists won," but I'm pretty sure that somewhere in the depths of Hell, Osama and his minions are watching us on Flame-O-Vision and laughing their asses off.

I step through the metal detector and, of course, it beeps. I don't know what it is – perhaps my magnetic personality; or maybe the neurosurgeon left something behind, or implanted a microchip in my spine, but this happens to me about 2/3rds of the time I fly. I back up and step through again, another beep. After weighing the options of making me strip and expose my generous man-boobs to a horrified world, the guard has me step through one more time. Lucky for the world, one of the many rolls circumnavigating my waist shifts enough to cover my bionic vertebrae and the thing remains silent.



This is what my spine looks like

Another TSA agent is waiting for me at the end, holding my CPAP machine.

“What’s this?” She asks.

“A CPAP Machine,” I could have answered.

“It keeps me breathing when I sleep,” I could have added.

Instead, I pull the hose and mask from the side pocket, slide it over my head and say in my best Tom Hardy voice:

“I am Bane, breaker of the Bat...Bow before me.”

She seems generally unimpressed.

“Sir, please remove the mask and step away from the machine.”

“But I’m Bane, if I remove the mask I’ll wither and die.”

That’s when two strong hands grip my biceps and a deep voice rumbles above my ear, “Sir, come with us please.”

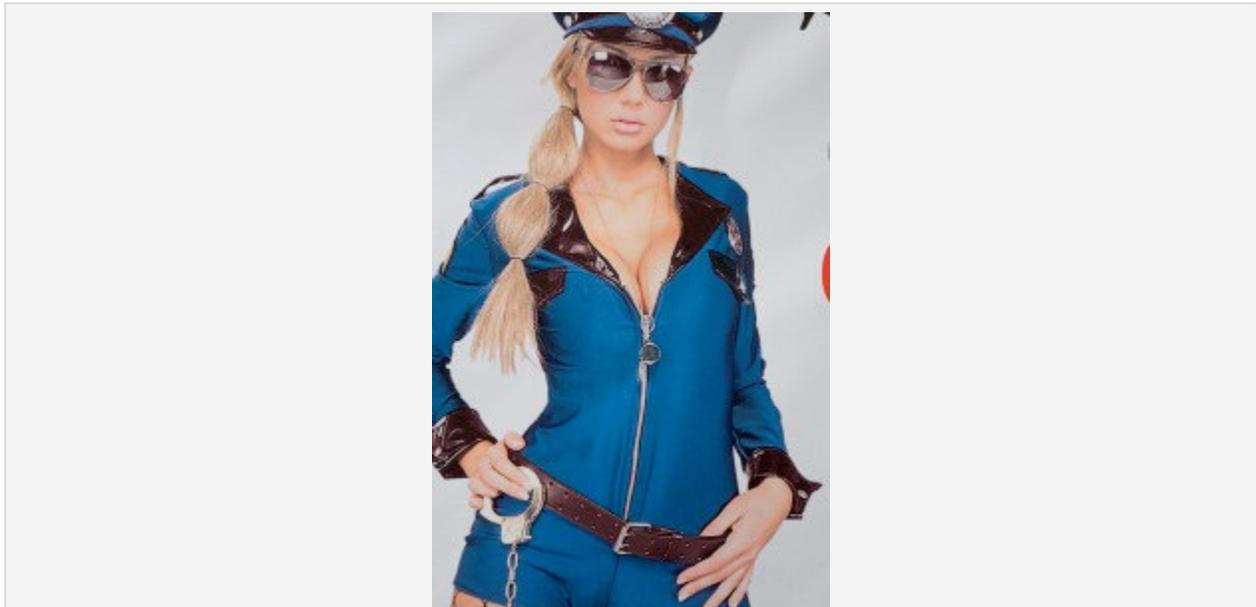
Who knew TSA agents didn’t have a sense of humor?



See the resemblance?

## Chapter II – Philly to San Fran

When last we chatted, I was being escorted to Airport security because SOMEBODY didn't appreciate my CPAP inspired Bane impersonation.



You know who you are (call me!)

Luckily for me, I used my superior intellect to devise a foolproof plan of escape. Namely, I cried. Huge blubbering sobs that ended with me huddled on the floor calling for my mother. The guards either decided I was no threat or simply grew so disgusted with me they just left me alone. Either way, victory was mine! I dashed to my gate and joined my travelling companions, Severa and Jebediah\*, who know me well enough to not look surprised when I came running up, covered in airport floor grime and still

wearing a CPAP mask. We got on the plane with no problems and enjoyed wonderful flight. In addition to a tiny, soundless screen embedded in the seat in front of me, the inflight entertainment included a five hour concert featuring Screaming Todd and the Baby Bawlers. Seriously, I started the flight hoping my in-laws would have a kid soon so I can satisfy that latent nesting gene I can't seem to shake, and ended it wondering where the local Ba'al worshipers were and whether I could get them to fire up their furnaces.



Screaming Todd and the Babies - coming to a Canaanite Festival near you

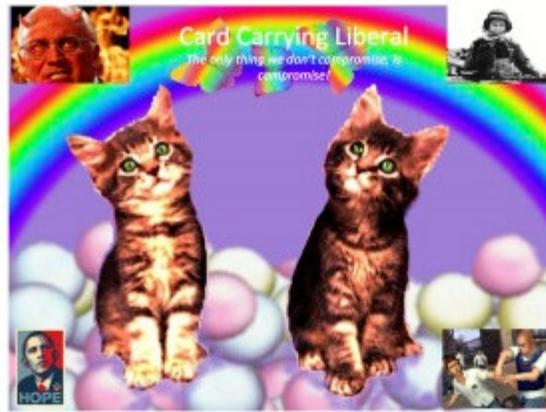
Finally we landed in San Francisco, West Coast bastion of Liberalism. And sure enough, near the men's room, I found a booth marked "Liberal Registration," manned by an aging, dread-locked gentleman wearing an ill fitting, tie-dyed police uniform and surrounded by a fogbank of patchouli. He leaned back in his chair, eyes closed and sandals resting on the desk in front of him.

"Excuse me, sir, I'm a liberal."

He opened one eye, gave one of those disdainful 'hmmph' sounds, and then resumed his nap.

"No really, I'm a card carrying liberal....climate change is real, Dick Cheney is evil, I love Barack Obama."

I pulled out my Liberal Card and placed it on the desk.



My Liberal Card

He rocked forward in his chair, picked up my card, then flicked it contemptuously back onto the desk.

“You’re an East Coast Liberal, my friend. Over here, you might as well be a Republican.”

A Republican? I had never been so insulted in my life....I started to tell him if he didn’t shut his yap, I’d have to cold-cock him until I realized that :

(1) using the word ‘cold-cock’ near an airport bathroom was a recipe for disaster...I mean what if Larry Craig showed up, and

(2) any display of violence, real or threatened, would violate the Liberal Credo of Pussification and would be playing right into his hands.

Instead, I leaned forward into his aura of patchouli and threw down the gauntlet.

“I’m as liberal as you are, hippie. Go ahead, try me.”

He grinned, shark-like, sending chills down my spine.

“OK, East Coast... let’s do this. Why are all corporations evil?”

“They’re not, some corporations are, but there are a many that...”

“WRONG! Corporations are ALL soulless entities that exist only to rape world culture and profit on the back of the working man....Who do you work for?”

“What? Um...Cabletown, which by the way are one of the good guys...”

“WRONG! Cabletown is a corporation and you, with your tie and your suspenders and your shoes with laces – you are a corporate shill. The only good thing about you is that cool Bane mask you’re wearing.”

He paused, victory dancing in his eyes.. He had one last *estoque* in his scabbard and I could see he relished piercing my neck with it.

“What...” he said, voice low and deadly and final... "do you drive? Hybrid or Electric?”

I looked down, beaten.

“A minivan,” I sobbed.

“A gas-guzzling minivan,” he said, incredulously, shaking his head in mock sadness.

He picked up my Liberal Card and tore it in half.

“You’re nothing but a LIMO\*\*. Get out of my sight. You sicken me.”

I turned, a broken, man without a party, and shuffled away, CPAP hose dangling between my feet.

And that's when the guy in the Batman costume showed up.

*\* Names changed to protect the innocent (namely me) from getting sued*

*\*\* LIMO - Liberal in Manners Only*

### Chapter III – Portland Proper

Dearest readers, I have a confession to make. I haven’t been exactly truthful in all parts of this story, specifically at the end of the last post, when I said a guy in a batman costume appeared. That was a lie. It was really just a guy in a batman shirt. And he didn’t really appear dramatically, he just walked by. And he didn’t really have on a batman shirt, it was really just a tee shirt with a stain in the front that I thought looked a little like a bat, or maybe like a brontosaurus, whatever, it’s not important, I’m just very sorry for lying to you...



You can see the bat, right? If you squint, and maybe turn your head to the left?

You people just don't realize the pressure I'm under with this blog. I had to end it dramatically to keep your interest, and if I just said "and then I got some yogurt at Pinkberry," it just wouldn't have the same impact, so I fibbed. I promise though, from this point forward, I will write nothing but God's honest truth.

So after I lured Toddler Todd and his Banshee Babies into the sacrificial temple, we boarded a much quieter flight to Portland. No one on the flight thanked me, but I could definitely sense their approval in the way they kept looking over at me, and then looking away quickly. I could almost hear them thinking "that guy in the Bane mask is really a hero, if I had to listen to that crying for one minute longer..." and then filling in whatever action they would take according to their own personal beliefs. Come to think of it, I'm not even sure if those kids were getting onto the plane to Portland, but it doesn't matter, someone was thanking me somewhere.

Anyway, Portland! I had done a great deal of research on the city (I watched the commercial for Portlandia like 10 times), but found that I still wasn't sure what I should expect. Sequoias? Lumberjacks? Sasquatch crossing guards? What I found was a small city, not entirely unlike Philadelphia (except it didn't smell quite so...interesting.) The people were definitely more polite. For example, I put on my turn signal at one point, and the gentleman in the next lane slowed down and let me move over. In Philly, turn signals are considered challenges that drivers use to motivate them to higher levels of douchery.



The Sasquatch Crossing guard initiative proved to be an unmitigated disaster

Other items of note, include a ridiculous number of strip clubs....I don't know what it is about that combination of mountain, forest, and seaside air, but it apparently makes people want to take off their clothes; and an equally ridiculous number of doggie day care centers, I guess for those days when you're visiting strip clubs that don't allow pets. Portland also has the world's smallest park and Voodoo doughnuts, a 24-hour shop which makes little man shaped pastry filled with raspberry that you can stab to death using a pretzel "pin." Portlanders are hard-core.



my new best friend...he was delicious

The only issue I had with Portland would be the roads, which seem to follow some logic I don't quite understand. Ramps and bridges seem to appear out of nowhere at impossible angles, and every road has a Prefix of "SW" or "South West." South West of what? In this one instance they've seemed to have adopted the Philadelphia mentality that if you don't already know where you're going, they're not going to help you find it. I'm willing to believe that in Portland, this is done as a way of helping you learn more about yourself and your fellow drivers. In Philly we just do it because we're plain mean.

The road situation was exacerbated by a GPS which was configured to the emotionally unstable, post-breakup psychotic woman setting. At one point, the GPS (we'll call her Gamine), instructed me to turn the wrong way up a one-way street. I ignored her and made some chuckling remark about woman drivers, which earned me scathing glances from my traveling companions, Seraphim and Jasmine.\*

After I ignored Gamine's instructions to make an illegal left turn for a third time, she asked shakily:

"Wh....Why are you ignoring me?"

"Um....I'm not allowed to turn left her, Gamine" (yes, I frequently have conversations with my GPS, it's something I'm working on in therapy.)

"Oh, sure. I'm only a GPS with about a zillion bits of information stored in me, why listen to me."

I wasn't sure what to say, so I drove on in uncomfortable silence. After a few moments, quiet sobs started.

"I won't be ignored Jim....you won't treat me like the last guy."

I looked helplessly at Sussidio and Juno\*\*, who were staring at me icily.

"You made her cry," seethed Sussidio

"You jerk!" jeered Juno

"But..." I...um....butted.

"If it's not too much trouble," Gamine sniffled, "turn left ahead."

I looked and sure enough, another illegal turn into a wall of oncoming traffic.

“But...”

“Turn left!!!!” Gamine, Sussidio, and Juno all screamed.

So I turned left, right into the path of a speeding Portland Seafood Company delivery van.

We were all about to die.

Wow, didn't this post turned dark.

*\* Names changed to protect the innocent from getting his ass kicked*

*\*\* Names changed again because it's too hard for the innocent to keep writing "Seraphim" and "Jasmine"*

#### Chapter IV – The Return

When last we spoke, I was being led by a scorned lady GPS right into the path of an oncoming Portland Seafood Company delivery truck. Me and my wandering, weary band of business travelers were mere moments away from become fishstick filler.



yeah, you would have liked that you little red-haired devil, you...

Luckily for all of us, I used my experience as [John Corzine's stunt driver](#) to avoid the truck. I had to jump the sidewalk and drive through a combined doggie day-care/strip club, but it ended well for all of us because I'm pretty sure those puppies did not like being chained to those poles AT ALL.

We finally found the hotel and had an excellent dinner, ironically enough at the Portland Seafood Company. It turns out, near death experiences really enhance the effectiveness of advertising....something my readers in marketing should look into. I can see it now, home invasions by

guys wearing McDonald's facemasks and wielding billy-clubs shaped like Coke bottles....hmmm... I might be onto something.

Sorry, I digress....we ate dinner, then exhausted by our journey and the last vestiges of adrenaline from our afternoon truck dodging, we ventured back to the hotel, where I fell into a deep, dreamless sleep (well, except for that one dream, you know, the one about the nun in clown makeup carrying the hand mixer....)



what? you don't have that dream?

The next two days were a whirlwind of training sessions, of meeting new people, our dulcet tones inspiring our classes to penultimate heights of learning. I mean, HR Systems and Processes are just the most fascinating of topics, with you know, those buttons you can push, and those...um....other buttons you can push...trust me, it's fascinating.



This was their 'fascinated' face, right?

Before we knew it, it was time to go. We dashed from the last training, trying to figure out ways to make a trip that had taken us 90 minutes a few days earlier happen in under an hour. We had obtained directions from our host, a shortcut that worked great for approximately 23 seconds outside the office complex and that failed when we came upon a three-point fork in the road that didn't exist anywhere on the map. One of the road choices *spiraled* around the other two, obviously one of those [Portland Weird](#) wormholes that

appear from time to time, and decided that the only way we were making our flight was bending the rules of space-time.

We took Continuum Bending Beltway (sorry, this being Portland, that's SW Continuum Bending Beltway), and ended up on a bridge – not a body of water in sight, but a bridge nonetheless – with about 72,000 other Portlanders, all inching along politely. I looked desperately at my travelling companions. They motioned towards the lonely, little screen tucked forlornly under the dashboard. I shrugged, plugged in the GPS, and was surprised when a loud, Austrian accent came blaring from the speaker (apparently someone had reset it to “Governator settings.”



traffic laws are for girlie-men

“YOU’VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE.” Garmie screamed. “TURN RIGHT NOW, NOW!”

“Right? But that’s a bike trail...”

“TURN RIGHT ONTO THE BIKE TRAIL, NOW! TURN RIGHT NOW!!!!!!”

With a rebellious scream, I turned right, the little sedan slaloming down the embankment like the Jamaican Bobsled team being chased by ..um....I don’t know, some kind of Jamaican Bobsled team eating monster.



zombie john candy, perhaps?

Anyway, it turns out the Governor had the right idea, because after barreling past a dozen picnickers, a pack of mountain bikers, and one pissed off Sasquatch crossing guard, we leapt over an embankment and right into the rental car return lot. I somehow convinced the attendant that the scratches, leaves, and angry looking salmon embedded in the grill were all there when I picked up the car, and we dashed through security, me tearing off my suspenders and tossing them through the x-ray machine as we passed. We arrived at our gate, breathing heavy, sweat streaming down our face, suspenderless pants puddled around my ankles, only to find our flight was delayed and we had another thirty minutes before the plane to San Francisco arrived.

After that, it was just plain plane travelling. We ate dinner in the San Francisco airport. I discovered that a fully populated red-eye is an exceedingly uncomfortable way to fly and maybe for the first time in my life wished I was shorter, since you need to be about five feet tall in order to curl up comfortably in an airplane seat. I also think I may be married to the guy sitting next to me on the way home to Philadelphia, or might as well be, since he spent the entire trip spooning me and kissing me on the ear ( I didn't really mind that part, he had such soft lips). I also learned that if you really want to get a great reaction at an airport, all you need to do is strap on a CPAP mask, throw on a leather wife beater, and shout 'I am Bane, breaker of the bat, bow before me.'



though it will probably sound like "garffle wheez smorkism grm"

Try it someday, I'm sure you'll find the results interesting.