

The Twittersphere Highway



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I've seen friends having issues with Twitter conversations recently, experience the horror of public shaming, the ritual of punishment by RT. The addiction of argument, justification, righteous ire point scoring. It's an interesting phenomena, what Twitter 'has become'. But what does that even mean?

Twitter is many things to many people. It's a conduit of information, knowledge and professional connection. It's a gossip stream, harmless fanboy/fangirl fun, trivia in excelsis. It's brand building, company bona fide sponsored message commercial business. It's personal influencer power, the what I say equals dollar value per word of bought and paid for praise of your product or service. Lies, then, in any other universe.

It's a torrent of boiling oil hatred, pouring over the hot coals of issues and ism's, flaring up into bright white heat flaming, shaming, taunting, blaming, threatening and sometimes even spilling over into actual physical violence.

It's the greatest excuse to get mad, get even. It doesn't matter who you aim your wrath at, or how deep that hatred goes, Twitter can accommodate your rage against the world.

The problem is that Twitter is a highway, but a different highway for different people and messages and ideas, all running synchronously together, layered one upon another. Like a multiverse reality from science fiction. Codes and signs and secret ways of communicating separate these intertwined worlds, and those secret signs are only even noticeable to those members for whom they have meaning. Everyone else is oblivious, too busy attending to their own secret sauce.

It's Pandora's Box, for real. Not a new thing to say but every day becomes a greater horror and a greater enabler. The tree of knowledge and life together, intertwined, just like the old books say. So, tread carefully children, you know not what lurks beneath your feet. Yet, if you do not go forth into the wilderness, you will deny yourself the greatest enlightenment.

Why blame the messenger, the bringer of truth, information, knowledge, doom? Think for a minute about different highways you walk or drive down, their character, atmosphere, implicit or explicit threat and risk, signs of friendliness and trust. Overt danger. These are not always obvious. I recall living in London in the early 1980s, in Earl's Court, a notorious area full of transient day and night populations: low income tourists, bed and breakfast houses, hotel service employees, hard drug dealers and takers, gay nightlife crowds, street boys and girls, pickpockets, muggers, and worse. I walked wide eyed into that world knowing very little about any of that. One of the first lessons I learned was to not walk around wide eyed. Look as if you didn't have a care, I learned, look as if you have lived there all your life, swagger, slouch, take your time, move in an unhurried way, look *bored*. This may be the first and only real rule of living in the city, look *bored* with it all. And this is your protection, like an invisible cloak of mithrael in the valleys of Mordor, the blows of spears and daggers will glance off you like water.

I got asked a while back how many times I had been mugged since living in the city. I was puzzled, what do you mean, how many times?, I said. The people I was with cheerfully recalled the two or three or more times they had been attacked, usually for their phones or bags or bicycles, only occasionally suffering physical harm. So when I said I had never been mugged, they were incredulous. I had lived in the city much longer than any of them, in rougher areas too, sometimes, and certainly in rougher times. I looked around the room that day and saw their wide eyed-ness. I knew then, how at risk they were, that they had never learned this trick, the look of world weary boredom.

And such is the Twittersverse. Stay safe, look bored, nonchalant, don't get involved with people screaming at each other, stay away from those street oilcan coal burners where people stand around warming their prejudices. Be aloof, stay cool. Detached. Find your own way of creating your mithrael, and you'll walk into Mordor without too much risk.

Img: sebastiaan stam