

Terrible Tools and Useless Inventions

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Entertainment

Midnight Facts for Insomniacs

Podcast Transcript

(Note: transcript consists of episode outline)

We've done a similar episode in the past—spectacular failures, episode 45, products that lawn darted—so this could be considered kind of a mark two, but this episode is a little more extreme. I'm calling these Terrible Tools and Useless Inventions. So there will be some harmless ones in the mix as palate-cleanser's, but we're primarily going to focus on some inventions that backfired spectacularly with disastrous consequences...or front fired or top fired. You'll see what I mean. For instance, our first terrible invention:

Land mines

If you're in the market for a weapon that cannot be aimed, kills indiscriminately, and does most of its damage by accident, you should probably not be allowed to choose or wield weapons, but regardless,

allow me to introduce one of the most popular and tragic inventions of all time, the land mine.

Land mines are among the cowardliest of weapons, because they are designed to do their killing from a distance, and they are also arguably among the dumbest, because they will boomsplode your friends just as readily as your enemies. They are the equivalent of announcing to the world, if I can't have this grassy field, no one can! Maybe the only positive thing you can say about land mines is that they are completely non-discriminating, so if you forget exactly where you placed them, they'll boomsplode you too.

Worldwide, some 78 countries are currently riddled with landmines, and they collectively kill some 15,000 to 20,000 people per year, while countless more are injured.

And these casualties are not combatants. These are villagers and children and old ladies and animals.

And to me, this is the most tragic aspect of land mines. Usually they're buried in rural areas, and they can often be triggered with as little as 6 kg of pressure, we're talking a large cat or a toddler or two average-sized chihuahuas walking side by side. Or a cat giving a chihuahua a piggyback ride. So many possibilities for tragic boomsplodes.

Land mines are not considered a

sign of military strength; when they're used in combat they're generally a tool of desperation, used by desperate tools. They are not an offensive weapon. You can't invade a country by setting landmines. You can't toss land mines in front of you, and placing them behind you only cuts off your opportunities for a retreat; I guess you could toss them AT your enemies but then those are really just bombs, except they're bombs that might land softly and not go off until you forget where you threw them and then oops. By definition, land mines are most effectively utilized by an army that is retreating. They are like a violent middle finger from a fleeing foe. Since their invention in 1938 they've been the go-to for guerrilla armies, rag tag militias, and ill-equipped terrorists. They can be created cheaply with minimal resources; for instance, we're all familiar with improvised explosive devices or IEDs in the Middle East.

The United Nations officially banned land mines via 1983's "Protocol on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Mines, Booby-Traps and Other Devices." And I love that the United Nations has an official document that contains the word Boobie. Because I am 10 years old. It's amazing to me that military personnel have used

that phrase with straight faces for decades. "I propose we flank the enemy, attacking in a pincher motion, sowing chaos and fear via a brutal display of overwhelming military force. Or we could set a booby trap. And maybe throw down some Whoopie cushions for the fun of it. And when we accept their surrender with a handshake, we will all wear hand buzzers and squirt them with our plastic lapel flowers. Like scamps."

In case you were wondering, the difference between a land mine and a booby trap is that a booby trap is typically improvised and solo, set one at a time, while land mines are set in groups. Booby traps are lonely land mines. Also, booby traps don't have to explode. They could drop you into a tiger cage or shoot arrows at your head or drop a bunch of spiders on your back. If Indiana Jones is involved, that's a booby trap. IED's straddle the line between booby-traps and land mines. They're often solo, and they typically explode. They're like the worst of both worlds. Whatever the opposite of peanut butter and chocolate is. They're like toffy and vinegar.

Some of the first landmines were created in China, related of course to the invention of gunpowder. Gunpowder isn't great for landmines, because it is deactivated by moisture, but one

common technique was to conceal a metal canister filled with gun powder attached to a long fuse, and then you would just have to light the fuse at the perfect time so that the explosion would coincide with the arrival of your enemy. It was not a foolproof plan, there was a lot of frustration and embarrassment and confused enemies wondering why the ground kept harmlessly exploding in the distance. The first pressure-sensitive versions, such as the one called--this is true--the "underground sky soaring thunder" involved the weight of a passerby triggering some type of Rube Goldberg reaction—I imagine a comical mousetrap situation with colorful rubber balls and levers and pulleys—that would light a flint, which would eventually ignite the gunpowder. In theory. This worked once. Land mines were abandoned quickly in China.

Incidentally, devices such as landmines and booby traps are commonly referred to as "victim-operated devices," because they are triggered by the victim. Which is kind of rude. It's like, "hey, I didn't poison that dude. I just poured some rat poison in a cup of coffee, and set it on the table in front of him. Who poured poison down whose throat? This is victim-operated poison."

The first modern land mine, the

Fladdermine, was invented by the Germans in 1573. I'm not sure why this is considered a *real* and/or particularly *modern* landmine because it wasn't much more sophisticated than the ancient Chinese mines...it was a heap of gunpowder that would be ignited by the firing of a flintlock, which was triggered via pressure or a tripwire. However, Germans would certainly prove be innovators in the field of buried-boomsplodes. Case in point, technology for the famous Claymore mine was developed by the Germans circa world war 2 but became infamous during the Vietnam war, Claymore mines are the only exception to the "cannot be aimed" rule, because a claymore is what is known as a directional mine, it fires projectiles in a predetermined direction. But I wouldn't call this aiming because it doesn't occur in real-time.

Perhaps the most infamous and dramatic land mines are the S mines —also developed by Germans and used extensively in World War 2—the most famous of which was known on the western front as the "Bouncing Betty." Do we need cutesy feminine names for horrendous weapons? "This is an adorable little frog-shaped device that burrows into your crotch and liquidates your bowels with actual

lava. We call it the Frolicking Francis." The bouncing Betty is the most famous example of "Bounding mines," or S mines—short for shrapnel mine, which is really all mines—but these are designed to launch themselves into the air and then detonate at an elevation of about 3 feet. That's horrific. This thing fucking springs up in front of you, it delivers a horror-movie jump scare and *then* it kills you. It really IS like a horror movie. It should be called the chucky, not the bouncing Betty.

One common landmine misconception was a Hollywood creation, the idea that mines are armed by pressure and then triggered by the release of that pressure, which led to the cliched and inaccurate portrayal of someone realizing they've stepped on a land mine and freezing, afraid to step off and blow up. Mines don't work like that. Wikipedia drily corrects this misconception by noting that mines "are designed to kill or maim, not to make someone stand very still until it can be disarmed." *Dummy*. That's the subtext. If you could write portions of Wikipedia entries under your breath, this would be one.

Smell-o-vision

There's a long tradition of attempting to use scent to enhance a multimedia experience.

Remember scratch and sniff books and stickers? They're still around today, apparently, and they work via microencapsulation technology... scent molecules are trapped in tiny little gelatin containers, and when you rupture those containers with your fingernail you release the scent. And as we know and have discussed numerous times, scent is strongly tied to memory and emotion and nostalgia, so when you pair a scent with a visual, that can either trigger a memory of the scent that is often associated with an emotion, or create a powerful new association. Moviemakers, who are in the business of creating visuals and triggering emotion, have always been aware of this fact. As far back as the 1860s individual theater owners attempted to use scent to enhance the moviegoing experience, mostly via perfumes and flowery fragrances pumped through the ventilation system. Film producer and distributor Arthur L Mayer developed a system for pumping scents into the Rialto Theater on Broadway in 1933, but was chagrined to find that specific scents would linger for days on end. Not great. Depending on the scents. If it's flowers, that's good, if it's a lingering odor of rat shit and mildew, less. This is the 1930s, all scented movies should have included rat shit and mildew. For realism.

Another problem facing the Rialto and all scent-enhanced theaters was the tendency of the human nose to have trouble transitioning quickly between scents, not to mention the fact that the aforementioned lingering of scent molecules means that many of the scents would mingle. So sometimes it would be hard to distinguish between the rat shit and the dirt. Which is just frustrating.

Walt Disney, as you might imagine, was captivated by the idea of using scents in conjunction with film and had initially intended to do so with the 1940s animated extravaganza fantasia, and I'm super curious to know exactly what fairies and giant demons would have smelled like. And centaurs. Also an army of terrifying, self-propelled mops. I'm guessing musty. That movie terrified me as a kid, my mom had to leave. I'm glad the movie wasn't also stinky. Scents would have elevated the film in my memory from terrifying to traumatic. The aromas of demons and fire and brimstone mixed with my fear-sweat? I'd never look at a mop the same. Or a demon. Fantasia really soured me on giant demons. I've always been suspicious of their motives ever since seeing that film. But Walt Disney quickly determined that it would be far too costly to

scientific Fantasia, and also that the entire idea of aromatic movies kind of sucked.

But other entrepreneurs were more persistent. Nevertheless, they persisted. So the first scent-dispersal system that was truly integrated into a theater by way of pipes connected to individual seats was created by Swiss inventor Hans Laube and debuted at the 1939 World's Fair in New York. Six years later, unable to secure investment from any film studios, Laube returned to Switzerland. Meanwhile the General Electric company was developing a similar technology, which they called Smell-o-Rama, and they released a demo in 1953, reigniting interest in the field of fragrant films. You know how the first movies with sound were called talkies? I wonder if anyone called these smellies. Less appealing. I see why they didn't take off. So two years later Laube was finally able to secure an investment from an American company. He returned to NY and in 1957 patented his Smell-O-Vision system. Film producer Mike Todd Jr. learned of the patent, and decided to incorporate Smell-O-Vision in a film dubbed Scent of Mystery. However, the Director, Jack Cardiff, was less than blown away by the technology. At some point during production, it finally occurred to him to ask producer Mike Todd Jr. if he had ever actually

experienced Smell-O-Vision, "Todd admitted that he had not. So samples were sent to them by Dr. Laube, the inventor of the process. [According to Jack] "It's hard to believe but each labelled glass smelled exactly the same as the others." Not a good sign.

Some of the scents featured in the movie:

- Pipe tobacco
- Gunpowder
- Shoe polish
- Gasoline
- Brandy
- Fresh sea air
- Peaches
- Bananas
- Wood shavings

And look, if your smell technology can't distinguish between gasoline and bananas, that does not bode well.

"Ads for the film proclaimed: 'First they moved (1895)! Then they talked (1927)! Now they smell!'" Producer Mike Todd, who was a bit of a showman, engaged in such hyperbole, saying, "I hope it's the kind of picture they call a scentsation!" He was promptly slapped by 100 million white gloves and challenged to a duel by all of America. Murder by consensus. There was a major publicity push for the film, and expectations were off the charts, especially considering the expense: it cost

around 30 bucks per seat to outfit the theater, and this is when a single ticket only cost one dollar.

So this is where the story gets good. Remember the cutthroat battle between VHS and Betamax? Or Sega and Nintendo? Coke and Pepsi? Barnum and Bailey? Fish and Chips? In 1959, a Public Relations executive named Charles Weiss announced that he had developed a competing odor system and was rushing to release a film called *Behind the Great Wall*, a travel-extravaganza through China featuring a smorgasbord of related scents.

According to Weiss, "I ... have invented a process to make movies smell. I call the process AromaRama. After more than two and a half years of work, our picture *Behind the Great Wall* will open December 2 at the Mayfair Theater in New York. In addition to seeing the action and hearing the dialogue, our audiences will be able to smell the scenes. More than 100 different aromas will be injected into the theater during the film. Among these are the odors of grass, earth, exploding firecrackers, a river, incense, burning torches, horses, restaurants, the scent of a trapped tiger and many more. We believe...that smells are surer than sounds or sights to make the

heartstrings crack." First, that's a dubious goal, it sounds dangerous, I'd like to keep my heart strings—my ventricles—intact, but also what does a trapped tiger smell like? Cat-piss and frustration? Unpleasant. Who captured the scent of a trapped tiger? Better get hazard pay. And I'm curious to smell their river-scent. Is it just water, or is it mossy? Could you identify the smell of a river vs a stream or a lake? I want to do the Pepsi challenge with various waters. I could identify pond water, or swamp water, or maybe ocean water. Can you be a water sommelier? "This is definitely... 1950s Italian faucet. This is Niagara falls through a Brita filter." This is Los Angeles acid rain, 1988 vintage. That was a good year for pollution. This is water from Flint Michigan, you bastard. I'm suing." And btw, horses don't really smell. Horse stables smell. Like the way not every dude stinks but every men's locker room stinks. So what were they using for horse scent? Is it the smell of horse crap? Just like the tigers, who's in charge of obtaining horse shit odor-molecules? There's a job. I bottle eau de crap. It's best when it's steaming. That's what you're getting is the steam. So apparently scents for the movie consisted of "72 smells that included incense, smoke, burning pitch, oranges, spices and a barnyard of geese." Super

appealing.

The two films rushed to the theaters, and Behind the Great Wall would beat Scent of Mystery to the theaters by one month. Reviews for Behind the Great Wall were mixed, but the bad ones were rough, and the film was not a financial success. As a result, expectations for Scent of Mystery were low. And the movie did not meet even those low expectations.

From a critic: "The smell O Vision system did not work well." The problems were myriad. Every jet of scent was accompanied by an annoying hissing noise, and some viewers had trouble smelling the scents, causing them to loudly sniff the air, so the theater was a noisy symphony of hissing and sniffing. Plus, the scents took time to spread through the air, which meant that viewers seated in the balcony would experience a smell delay. So they'd be smelling shoe polish while the villain was smoking a pipe. It was very confusing. The film was a failure.

And the actual physical implementation may have been the biggest problem; the daughter of Smell-O-Vision created Hans Laube would later claim Smell-O-Vision never really got to show its potential. The theater had cut corners and mostly used the

ventilation system rather than installing scent dispersers at each seat.

Scent of Mystery would later be re-released as Holiday in Spain, without scents, and according to the Daily Telegraph, "the film acquired a baffling, almost surreal quality, since there was no reason why, for example, a loaf of bread should be lifted from the oven and thrust into the camera for what seemed to be an unconscionably long time." Why has the camera been focused on that steaming horseshit for twenty minutes? In the 1980s, MTV aired Scent of Mystery along with scratch and sniff cards that could be purchased from convenience stores so that home viewers could recreate the aromatic experience. They're called "convenience stores" but it's not remotely convenient to have to purchase a smelly card to watch tv.

Sony CD copy protection

Digital rights management, or DRM, encompasses a controversial set of technologies that are intended to protect intellectual property. Not physical property, this technology couldn't stop you from stealing a CD, but the idea was to stop a consumer from copying and distributing the data on the disc.

Which is inherently tricky. This is an attempt to lock down ones and zeroes. Also known as digital haterism, it's a real buzzkill technology. I understand the idea, we get it Lars Ulrich, artists should be paid for their art. But look, very few rich people are software or music or video pirates. People only steal digital files when they're hurting for money and/or when those files aren't reasonably priced. And we've proven this with the Apple music store and Amazon on demand, etc. People will pay reasonable prices for reasonable value. But that's not what CD makers and the music industry wanted. They wanted you to buy a CD of nine songs you didn't want just to get the one song you did. It was a real conundrum—I wanted All Star, but I didn't want to give twenty dollars to Smashmouth, so I was All-Starless until Napster came along. File-sharing app Napster and its creator, Shawn Fanning, would change the game. The first popular peer-to-peer file-sharing service, Napster offered free music for the masses, and even though it would be sued into oblivion by a bunch of greedy musical assholes, it was too late; a deluge of torrent sites and file sharing services like limewire and Kazaa would be the cats that got out of the bag. Musical assholes btw is an amazing phrase. The music industry would never recover

and today the revenue from music sales is a fraction of what it used to be—I guarantee music executives still have PTSD over that little cat-with-headphones logo—but it's their own fault, because the real problem is that they hated the entire idea of a la cart pricing, and to me that's just anti-capitalist. You should give the market what it wants, and what the market wanted was to be able to buy an individual song. I rent movies all the time on Apple TV, because now I have disposable income and rentals are reasonably priced. But when I was a poor college kid, I didn't have the luxury of frivolous spending. I had to save my money for necessities like beer and bong. So in the wake of Napster, for once the bad guys lost, and the music industry would have to completely reevaluate their business model and abandon DRM—at least for music—completely. But they didn't go down without a fight, and no digital rights management story was more egregious and ultimately satisfying than that of Sony's Extended Copy Protection, or XCP.

XCP wasn't just designed to stop you from copying the contents of a CD to your hard drive—known as “ripping” the cd. It went much, much further.

XCP was straight up spyware, in every sense of the word. First, to play the CD in a computer you first

had to agree to an EULA (an end user license agreement). If the user didn't agree to the terms, the computer would immediately spit out the disk. But even if you did agree, and even if you read through the entire license agreement, you would have no idea what the XCP was doing, because the spyware wasn't mentioned in the agreement at all. Accepting the end-user license agreement automatically installed a secret program "The software will then remain resident in the user's system, intercepting all accesses of the CD drive to prevent any media player or ripper software other than the one included with XCP-Aurora from accessing the music tracks of the Sony CD. No obvious way to uninstall the program is provided. Attempting to remove the software by deleting the associated files manually will render the CD drive inoperable due to registry settings that the program has altered."

This is another mob shakedown. "I wouldn't try to uninstall that program if I was you. Wouldn't want your computer to have an accident. We're gonna break your digital kneecaps."

The story gets worse. It was soon revealed that the spyware not only concealed itself from the user, but in doing so utilized clumsy and

overly broad cloaking techniques that allowed other nefarious programs to piggyback on the technology, which meant that XCP was aiding and abetting viruses and Trojans. It was an accessory to hacking. This was bad. Critics pointed out that not only was Sony aiding hackers to install viruses and Trojan horses, XCP itself could be characterized as a Trojan horse.

"XCP.Sony.Rootkit installs a DRM executable as a Windows service, but misleadingly names this service "Plug and Play Device Manager", employing a technique commonly used by malware authors to fool everyday users into believing this is a part of Windows. Approximately every 1.5 seconds, this service queries the primary executables associated with all processes running on the machine, resulting in nearly continuous read attempts on the hard drive. This has been shown to shorten the drive's lifespan. Furthermore, XCP.Sony.Rootkit installs a device driver, specifically a CD-ROM filter driver, which intercepts calls to the CD-ROM drive. If any process other than the included Music Player (player.exe) attempts to read the audio section of the CD, the filter driver inserts seemingly random noise into the returned data, thus making the music unlistenable.

XCP.Sony.Rootkit loads a system filter driver which intercepts all calls

for process, directory or registry listings, even those unrelated to the Sony BMG application. This rootkit driver modifies what information is visible to the operating system in order to cloak the Sony BMG software. This is commonly referred to as rootkit technology.

Furthermore, the rootkit does not only affect XCP.Sony.Rootkit's files. This rootkit hides every file, process, or registry key beginning with \$sys\$. This represents a vulnerability, which has already been exploited to hide [World of Warcraft](#) RING0 hacks as of the time of this writing, and could potentially hide an attacker's files and processes once access to an infected system had been gained." Jesus. What does it NOT do? "XCP also punches your genitals, steals your girlfriend, and feeds chocolate to your dog." This is the worst program ever.

But now comes the really good part. It turned out that Sony's elaborate, super-secret and absolutely illegal DRM technology could be disabled by removing the CD from the case and simply drawing along the edge of the CD with a regular, run-of-the-mill black magic marker. Obscuring the data track caused computers to treat the CD as a normal audio disc by default. Sony's nefarious plan was foiled by ink. Well, actually, by the company's own ineptitude.

Which is worse: to be an evil corporation, or to be an aspiring evil corporation that can't even achieve a functional state of wickedness. When you aren't even competent enough to be shady af.

Hydrogen blimps

Let's first define some terms:

blimps are large inflated airships or dirigibles that achieve lift via helium, hot air, or, if you are cheap and stupid, hydrogen. Blimps maintain their form simply via the pressure of the gas, they're ultimately just big balloons, while Zeppelins on the other hand feature a rigid framework that encapsulates and support the gasbags and gondola.

Ferdinand von Zeppelin designed the first zeppelin in 1900. After a few embarrassing design failures: false starts, broken clutch springs, water damage, and some minor running into trees, the major design flaws were ironed out and zeppelins became passenger carriers, helping to establish the age of air transport. They were even used in World war one to drop bombs on the UK, Belgium, and France. Humiliating way to go out. Killed by balloon, ain't that a bitch. Like death by confetti. "The birthday boy lost his life in a horrific party-popper incident. It was equal parts tragic

and delightful." "Weather and night flying made airship navigation and accurate bombing difficult. Bombs were often dropped miles off target...and hitting military installations was impossible. The civilian casualties made the Zeppelins an object of hatred and they were dubbed 'baby-killers.'" Baby killing balloons. That's such a betrayal. It's like a tennis ball that attacks dogs. Or a red dot that kills cats...it's an actual laserbeam.

"With the development of defensive measures the airship raids became much more risky and in 1917 the airships were largely replaced by aeroplanes." Also, airplanes were better in every other conceivable way. Speed and accuracy and basically not being a giant gassy bag of boomsplode.

Incidentally, Midnight Fact: the potential for air attacks at any hour (which might necessitate fleeing on short notice) led directly to the development of pajamas for women.

That's true. Before then women typically wore nightgowns to bed, which, while comfortable, were not well suited to desperate, panicked fleeing. Pajamas are superior when it comes to the act of dashing ahead of explosions. I never knew that: pajamas are basically athletic sleepwear. Just in case.

Ferdinand Von Zeppelin would die in 1917, 30 years before the

Hindenberg disaster that would prove to be the death knell for rigid airships and also a bunch of people. 37 of them. 36 on the ship and one unlucky guy on the ground.

But the writing had been on the wall for hydrogen dirigibles for two decades. Here is a list of some of the most spectacular dirigible disasters between 1908 and 1937. [show photo]. That's a lot. I mean maybe not compared to the volume of aircraft disasters now, but you have to realize that the number of aircraft in the sky today on a daily basis is in the six digits. Back then it was like the digit six.

Some notable accidents:

"LZ-4 (August 5, 1908)

After an emergency landing near Echterdingen, Germany, LZ-4 was torn from its temporary mooring by a gust of wind and ignited after hitting a stand of trees."

"LZ-6 (September 14, 1910) owned by the world's first passenger airline, DELAG, [the LZ-6] was destroyed at Baden-Oos by a hydrogen fire which began when a mechanic used petrol to clean the ship's gondola." I'm just gonna spray this floating bomb with liquid propellant. Don't mind me. Insert carefree whistling.

"LZ-10 Schwaben (June 28, 1912)

The passenger airship Schwaben was destroyed by fire at the airship field at Dusseldorf when its

hydrogen was ignited by static electricity from the ship's rubberized fabric gas cells." That's how flammable these things were, they could be ignited by the atmosphere, like you didn't have to do anything wrong it could just be the result of air-friction. Like uh-oh, the air is rubbing on this balloon pretty aggressively, boom, seventy dead.

"LZ-53/L-17 and LZ-69/L-24
(December 28, 1916)

While L-24 was being returned to the shed it shared with L-17 at TÅnder, a gust of wind lifted the ship into the roof of the shed; a light bulb ignited a hydrogen fire which destroyed both ships." It's not funny, but Jesus.

"SL-9 (March 30, 1917)

SL-9 burned after being struck by lightning in flight over the Baltic, killing all 23 persons aboard."

"R101 (October 5, 1930)

The poorly-designed British R101 lost altitude and sank into a hillside near Beauvais, France. The impact was slight and caused few if any injuries, but the ship's hydrogen ignited and the ensuing inferno killed 48 of the 55 passengers and crew."

"Wingfoot Air Express (July 21, 1919)

Goodyear's Wingfoot Air Express ignited in mid-air and crashed through the skylight of the Illinois

Trust & Savings Building in Chicago, Illinois, killing three persons on the ship and ten bank employees and injuring another 27 people. All subsequent Goodyear airships were inflated with helium."

So the Hindenburg would not be the most dramatic dirigible disaster, not by a long shot, but it would be the last straw.

Now speaking of the various gases that could be used to provide lift, let's talk about the difference between hydrogen and helium. Both gasses are lighter than air, and both feature almost the same lifting power, but helium has the benefit of not being an explosive gaseous tinderbox. It is not flammable, which is why birthday parties full of balloons don't turn into Heroshima. So why did most zeppelins use hydrogen? Because of the worst and most obvious reason. Helium was expensive, and was primarily being produced in America.

The Hindenburg was a large Zeppelin that had begun carrying passengers in 1936, and already had ten successful transatlantic flights under its belt by the date of the 1937 tragedy. In fact, the zeppelin had just flown over the Atlantic Ocean without incident, a flight from Germany to New Jersey. The cause of the explosion has never been conclusively determined, but based on what we

know about the sturdiness of these things, it was probably a butterfly fluttering just a tiny bit too enthusiastically within a mile of the crash site.

The Hindenburg was some 300 feet above the landing site when it caught fire. As we mentioned, this wasn't the most tragic of Zeppelin crashes, but it quickly achieved infamy due to the large contingent of press on hand, and the dramatic fiery crash would be shown on repeat in newsreels across the country. If you've ever seen the footage it is undeniably dramatic, the craft splits in half, jets of flames burst from the nose as the tail end of the flaming wreckage crashes down in the empty field. The entire ordeal took less than 40 seconds, but that was enough time to sear the images and audio into the collective American psyche, including a phrase that would become part of the zeppelin zeitgeist. I'm referring to the famous voiceover of journalist Herman Morrison: "This is terrible; this is one of the worst of the worst catastrophes in the world. Oh it's... its flames... Crashing, oh! oh, four or five hundred feet into the sky, and it's a terrific crash, ladies and gentlemen. There's smoke, and there's flames, now, and the frame is crashing to the ground, not quite to the mooring mast. Oh, the humanity." Life magazine printed

many of the most famous photos, and the public opinion of Zeppelins would take a nose dive. You might say on that fateful day in 1937, the reputation of airships went up in flames. Sorry. The crash was undeniably terrible. Most of the 36 deaths are listed as a direct result of the fire, but some of the victims died leaping to their deaths to *escape* the fire, so while technically those deaths are considered to be the result of impact, I would say the fire was at least tangentially responsible for those as well. Credit where it's due. There were actually 62 survivors, the majority of passengers and crew survived, including an acrobat who lowered himself out the window as the dirigible descended and dropped about twenty feet, then rolled safely away. Putting those skills to good use. People make fun of circus-folk, but look, I grew up in a circus, it's a long story, but the bottom line is that yes I may have suffered mocking from my peers and lived in tents for months at a time, but if I'm ever involved in a horrific balloon crash, I'll have the last laugh. Otherwise there's pretty much no benefit to my circus skills, so I'm really hoping there's a balloon crash in my future.

Shutter shades

I'm doing this for you. I want to get it out of the way. Also for consistency, because this episode has been basically an attack on the Germans, which feels appropriate because most of the 20th century was a German attack on the rest of the world. But I think half of the inventions we discussed were German, and they were the really tragic ones, so it seems appropriate that we should mention the humanitarian travesty that was Shutter shades. These fashion abortions are the fault of three historical figures: macho man Randy savage, Kanye West, and every German ever. I blame them all. We get very few downloads from Germany so I'm comfortable putting them on blast.

Shutter shades have emerged like cicadas at various times in history. They tend to pop up when fashion has reached its zenith, its low point, we originally associate them with the 1980s, and later Kanye West would drag them back into pop culture in the early 2000s, but I was able to find evidence that they actually originated in Germany circa 1952. A June 1952 issue of an Australian magazine features an ad with a photograph of a woman wearing "a novel idea from Germany —sunglasses with venetian blinds." I'm not saying this invention is as bad as zeppelins and land mines, but it's not great.

As mentioned, the popularity of shutter shades in the 1980s is partly attributed to Randall Mario Poffo, a.k.a. the professional fake-wrestler Macho Man Randy Savage. I think it's important to differentiate between professional wrestling and fake professional wrestling, and I'm not making fun of theatrical wrestling, it's a totally valid art form, it's just like watching a play or a weekly drama series, but if I were a real wrestler I would be pissed when people referred to those guys as pro wrestlers. It would be like calling someone a racecar driver because they play Mario kart. So Macho Man Randy Savage was the steroid-pumped, weirdly hyper "snap into a slim Jim" guy. I sort of always associate him with the Kool-Aid man because in my head they both say, "oh, yeah!" Macho Man famously wore these shutter shades, though I'm not convinced he was the real reason they took off. He also wore banana hammocks and breakaway shirts, and those didn't exactly hit the mainstream. But whatever, he gets a lot of the credit, and those shades definitely were popular for a hot minute in the 80s. They disappeared, thank God, and then were resurrected like fashion zombies by one of the worst human beings on earth—appropriately—Kanye West, in his video for the song "stronger." Which is one of the only songs of Kanye

West that I enjoy, because Kanye is really at his best when he just outright steals other people's songs, and that song was fully a Daft Punk song that he added a few lyrics to. Shutter shades have since faded back into obscurity, foreshadowing the inevitable fate of Kany West, a fate that needs to get crackin'. Get a move on, fate.

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