



The Butterfly Effect

By Tony Wu

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Remember the movie Jurassic Park? In that classic Spielberg thriller, Dr. Ian Malcolm, the eccentric, highly intelligent mathematician played by Jeff Goldblum, described the “Butterfly Effect” - the notion that every event, even something as insignificant as a butterfly flapping its wings in Beijing, affects the pattern and direction of all future events.

Goldblum’s brief primer on Chaos theory foreshadowed the discovery by other characters in the movie that dinosaurs genetically engineered not to breed had somehow managed to do just that. Scientists in the movie had unleashed a series of unintended, potentially destructive consequences, just as Dr. Malcolm had predicted.

Normally, I don’t remember much from movies. I tend to sit back, enjoy, and forget everything once I’ve left the theatre. This particular movie and this particular concept, though, came to mind the other day when I opened an email. It was an article about seal lions in the Galapagos, those adorable, whiskered aquatic mammals that everyone loves, especially people lucky enough to have swum with them.

But this article wasn’t about enjoying the company of precious pinnipeds. It was, in fact, about the Butterfly Effect. In the article, the Ecuadorian Environment Minister, Lourdes Luque, stated that at least 35 sea lions had been found on San Cristobal Island with their heads

cracked open. All were male. All had had their genital organs removed. “What kind of demented pervert collects sea lion penises?”, I thought.

Luque noted that even though killing sea lions is prohibited in the Galapagos preserve, authorities had found twelve other sea lions the previous year in the same condition. What could possibly be the motivation behind this? A personal vendetta? I had read before that some fishermen consider sea lions as competition, and may kill them in the misguided belief that fewer sea lions will translate into more plentiful fish. But if this were the case, then why remove the reproductive organs? I read on...

An official spokesman for the park noted that the sea lion genitals had most likely been collected to supply aphrodisiacs to consumers in Asia. That’s when Dr. Ian Malcolm popped into my head. In this case, it wasn’t a butterfly flapping its wings, but it was men on the other side of the globe who wanted a little help flapping their wings, so to speak.

Demand for sea lion penis concoctions by male consumers in Asia was beginning to create a market for Galapagos sea lion genitals. The potential consequences are mind boggling. What will happen if more people cash in on the genital bounty? Can Galapagos sea lion populations survive sustained hunting? Will the sea lions be hunted to extinction? If they are, how will the ecosystem

be affected? Which sea lions are next on the list? Californian? Australian? When does it end?

Then there’s the underlying absurdity. Does anyone really believe that grinding up an animal’s penis and ingesting it will enhance one’s virility? Eeyuck, I sure hope not. Are there really that many desperate men in Asia to warrant killing sea lions all the way in the Galapagos? For those who genuinely need help, wouldn’t it be better to ask for Viagra rather than scarf down dessicated pinniped genitals?

Here’s the thing about the Butterfly Effect. It isn’t just for oddball scientists and imaginary sauropods. It applies to everyday life, to you and me, to the choices we make. If we choose to place false hope on sea lion penises for potency, then sea lions and their ecosystems will suffer. If we choose to demand tasteless, nutrition-less sharkfin soup to prop up our egos, then shark populations and their related ecosystems will collapse. If we elect to dynamite our reefs for the sake of a grilled fish dinner, then our dive sites will disappear.

You get the point. No matter what we do, there will always be consequences, some intended, many not. But intelligent, rationale people can choose to act wisely to limit damage to the world around us. In the movie, Dr. Malcolm repeatedly warned that “Life will find a way”. In my mind, it’s up to each of us to find a way to let life carry on.