MAX PARADOX

PROBLEM? RELAX. YOU'VE GOT THIS!

Self-Help with a Sense of Humor ;)

I Read All the News and Now I'm Afraid of Everything

How to Stop Doomscrolling Without Moving Into a Cave



We have a problem. Relax. We can solve it—and have a laugh along the way.

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INTRO

You open your phone to check the weather.

That is the official story, anyway.

Thirty-seven minutes later, you know that a bridge collapsed somewhere you have never visited, a mysterious virus has been detected in three people on another continent, economists are arguing about whether the economy is secretly terrible, publicly terrible, or about to become historically terrible, and somebody on social media has posted a map covered in red arrows that appears to indicate civilization will end shortly after lunch. You still do not know whether you need an umbrella.

So you keep scrolling.

Maybe the next article will clarify things. Instead, the next article explains that artificial intelligence may eliminate your job. The one after that says your retirement savings are in danger. Then there is a headline about microplastics, another about extreme weather, another about cybercrime, another about political instability, and a helpful video titled something like 7 SIGNS SOCIETY IS COLLAPSING THAT NOBODY IS TALKING ABOUT.

Apparently everybody is talking about them.

By the time you finally put the phone down, nothing has happened to you personally. Your apartment is still there. Your coffee has gone cold, but otherwise the physical evidence suggests civilization survived the morning. Yet your nervous system is behaving as though you have personally been appointed Head of Emergency Management for Planet Earth, effective immediately, with no training and terrible dental coverage.

This is the strange achievement of doomscrolling: you can remain completely stationary while emotionally fleeing fourteen disasters.

And because you are a responsible adult, you tell yourself that this is not doomscrolling. You are staying informed.

That sounds much better.

"Doomscrolling" sounds like something done at 1:17 a.m. by a person wearing one sock and eating crackers directly over the sink. "Staying informed" sounds like something performed by an engaged citizen who owns a respectable coffee machine. The problem is that your brain does not care what you call it. If you spend an hour feeding it a concentrated stream of threats, conflict, outrage, catastrophe, speculation, and footage accompanied by the phrase DEVELOPING STORY, it is going to react.

Your brain is not a newsroom. It is an anxious intern with access to push notifications.

The news itself is not the enemy. Knowing what is happening matters. Major events matter. Politics, economics, wars, elections, climate, health, technology, local problems, public safety—these things can affect your life, sometimes enormously. The goal of this book is not to convince you to move into a forest, throw your phone into a lake, and learn what happened in the world every six months from a traveling blacksmith.

You do not need less reality.

You need a better relationship with the delivery system.

Modern news is delivered through an environment that has very little interest in saying, "Here are the five things worth knowing today. You may now go make dinner." The system has endless space, endless updates, endless competition,

and a powerful incentive to keep your attention for one more headline. Then another. Then a video. Then a live blog. Then comments beneath the live blog, because apparently the one thing missing from an international crisis was Dennis from Ohio explaining geopolitics in all caps.

This creates a very specific problem. Your brain evolved to pay attention to danger because ignoring danger was historically a poor long-term strategy. A strange noise in the bushes deserved attention. Smoke on the horizon deserved attention. Someone shouting that a large animal was approaching deserved considerably more attention than someone announcing that the berries looked particularly nice today.

Negative information therefore arrives with a built-in VIP pass.

Now give that ancient threat-detection system a device capable of supplying thousands of alarming stories from every country on Earth before breakfast. Your brain cannot naturally distinguish between “This is terrible and relevant to me right now” and “This is terrible, happened 6,000 miles away, and there is absolutely nothing useful I can do with this information at 11:43 p.m.”

Emotionally, both may enter through the same door.

That is why doomscrolling can feel weirdly compelling even when it makes you miserable. You are not necessarily enjoying it. You may actively dislike it. But part of your brain keeps whispering that the next update could be important.

One more article.

One more refresh.

One more expert explaining what could happen next.

Eventually you know twelve possible futures and cannot relax in the current one.

There is another trap: uncertainty. Bad news is frightening, but unfinished bad news is especially sticky. When something important is developing, your brain wants closure. It wants the final answer, preferably presented in a neat box with three bullet points and a reassuring conclusion. Real life rarely cooperates. Experts disagree. Early reports change. Predictions fail. Information arrives in fragments. A story can remain "developing" for days while you keep checking as though refreshing the page might personally accelerate history.

It will not.

You are not helping the situation by pressing reload harder.

Then there is the social layer. News no longer ends when you finish the article. Beneath it lies an enormous secondary universe of reactions, arguments, screenshots, rebuttals, counter-rebuttals, people saying "THIS," people saying "WAKE UP," and people confidently announcing that everybody else has been brainwashed except them and three accounts with cartoon avatars.

You can start by checking one factual update and end forty minutes later emotionally involved in an argument between two strangers named PatriotDad1974 and MoonGirlActual.

Neither knows you exist.

Both have ruined your evening.

The result is not simply "too much information." It is a distorted sense of how much danger exists, how close it is, how much you are personally responsible for tracking, and how frequently you need to check whether something has changed. When repeated often enough, the habit can make

ordinary life feel strangely irresponsible. You are making pasta while somewhere something awful is happening. You are watching a comedy while another crisis develops. You are going for a walk while your phone contains seventy-three unresolved emergencies.

So you check again.

Not because checking helps.

Because not checking begins to feel negligent.

This book is about breaking that loop without becoming uninformed, detached, or the person at work who discovers three weeks late that there was an election. We are going to separate useful information from compulsive monitoring. We will look at why certain headlines grab you, why endless updates create the illusion of control, why "just checking quickly" frequently develops the structural complexity of a military operation, and why consuming more information does not automatically make you better prepared.

More importantly, we are going to build a practical way to stay informed without allowing the news to occupy your entire mental living room.

You will learn how to decide what information actually deserves your attention, when to check it, when to stop, how to handle breaking news, how to avoid getting dragged from reporting into endless reaction, and what to do when your hand has already opened the news app before the rest of you noticed.

There will be no requirement to delete every app, meditate for ninety minutes, or become the sort of person who says, "I simply choose peace," while owning seventeen crystals.

We will work with the brain you actually have.

The one that wants to know what is happening.

The one that occasionally believes another twelve minutes of scrolling will finally make everything feel settled.

And the one that deserves to discover something important:

Being informed and being constantly alarmed are not the same thing.

Your job is not to personally supervise the entire planet.

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Chapter 1 - Your Brain Has No Map

You are sitting on your couch.

This matters.

The couch is not on fire. Nobody is chasing you. Your refrigerator contains food, your front door is locked, and the loudest immediate threat may be the washing machine making a noise it has apparently been saving for the exact moment the warranty expired.

Then you open the news.

Within ten minutes, you have seen footage of flooding in one country, protests in another, a factory explosion somewhere else, a chart predicting economic trouble, a crime story from a city you have never visited, and a politician warning that the next few months may be “critical.”

Your body remains on the couch.

Your nervous system has gone international.

This is one of the first things you need to understand about doomscrolling: information travels far more efficiently than emotional context.

Your phone can show you a disaster from 4,000 miles away with the same brightness, size, sound, and visual urgency as a warning about something happening two streets from your home. The screen does not naturally say:

IMPORTANT, BUT DISTANT.

DISTURBING, BUT NOT CURRENTLY RELEVANT TO YOU.

THIS HAPPENED THREE DAYS AGO AND IS BEING RECIRCULATED BECAUSE PEOPLE ARE ANGRY AGAIN.

Instead, everything arrives in roughly the same rectangle.

That rectangle is six inches from your face.

Your brain was not designed with this arrangement in mind.

For most of human history, information had geography. If you heard screaming, it was probably happening somewhere nearby. If a person ran into the village shouting about a fire, the correct response was not to ask whether the incident occurred on another continent and had already been contained by local authorities.

Danger information tended to be local because nearly everything was local.

Modern media removed that limitation.

You can now receive the most frightening event from each corner of the world before finishing your cereal.

This creates a strange emotional distortion. Your logical brain may know that five unrelated disasters occurred in five unrelated places. Your threat-detection system receives something closer to:

DISASTER.

DISASTER.

DISASTER.

DISASTER.

DISASTER.

Good morning.

The problem becomes even stronger when stories are visual. A written paragraph creates some distance. A video can place you inside the event. You hear shouting. You see smoke. You watch people running. Your body reacts before the more analytical parts of your mind have completed the administrative paperwork required to establish where this