

# St. Some (rant) Times

INCREDIBLE

SILLY CRAP

THAT BOGGLES

MY MIND

JANUARY 2024  
V280



# 2024 Rant

## They are TRYING... but it hurts so much.

First of all, don't you just love this sweatshirt? I do. I had to take a picture because the saying on the back is perfect. It fit me even more when I was younger, but now that I am old and wise (yeah right)...

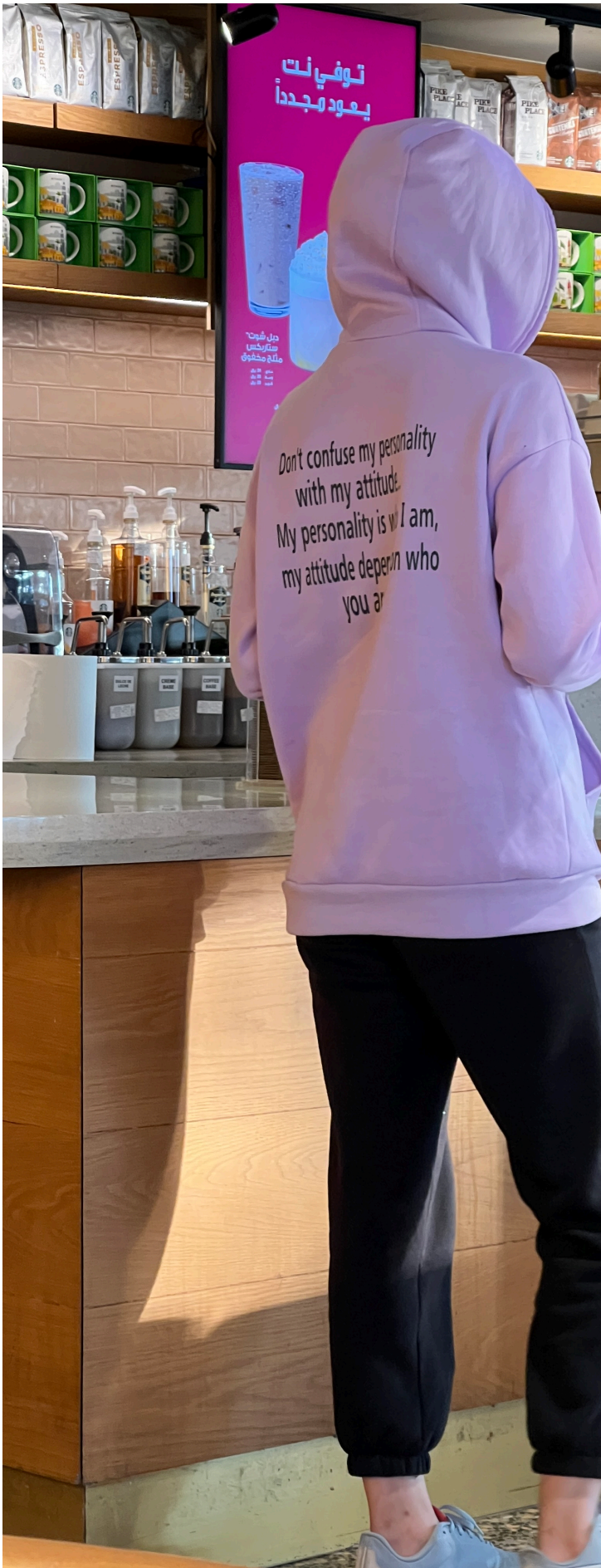
Starbucks here. The following snippet is a perfect example of living overseas, when ideas are implemented but don't quite make it to logic.

I sit in Starbucks almost every weekend. Most of my friends consider it my "weekend office". Most Fridays and Saturdays consist of time spent between six in the morning until mid-afternoon. I found out today, that I am a "Gold Member". If I used my SB points to buy the entire school staff a coffee, I'd probably still have points left over.

If you read this newsletter, you already know there is **no** such thing as Chai Latte at any - that is an emphatic ANY Starbucks - on the island. Some parts of the Middle East, maybe. Not sure. But I certainly know, **NOT HERE**. Why? I've heard rumors that Chai latte is closely related to Buddhism - Chai...Indian...tea...Buddha...not... er... not...this place...er...too...Buddhist...nuffsaid...

But, they still had it on their signs with a price. Every store. All over. When ordered, "khalas, finished, no have". Arggh.

2024. I'm sitting here now. Drinking my first chai latte. It started two weeks ago. "Mr. Greg, we might have Chai latte next week", said one of the usual barristas. "No effing way!" It didn't happen. Then...another week later...today.



# My Ranting

I come out of the bathroom. Sit down. The barista calls out my name and motions for me to come to the register.

“Sir Greg, you are a Gold Member. Would you like to try our new Chai Latte drink? I have prepared this for you. It’s only for Gold Members.”

I stood there dumbfounded. He asked me three times if I wanted to try the Chai. The haze of confusion dissipated and I fell into the logic trap that I had long ago learned to avoid.

“Can I buy more? Do you have it?”, I asked.

“Yes, you are a gold member. But we only have twenty two for gold members.”

Perhaps this was a language problem. But the Saudi girl and the two Filipinos behind the counter, as well as the smiling Filipino Chai Santa Claus in front of me all spoke more than passable English.

“So I can have more?”

“Yes, you are a Gold Member” he confirms. Wow. I am a Gold Member. How powerful. What benefits! I still didn’t understand. But as I sit here, mind wandering, typing furiously to ease my shock and awe, it tastes like Starbucks Chai Latte from all over the world. Imagine that. The beauty of franchising.

It helps to type this out. Perhaps this is an instance of my histrionic behavior of making a mountain etc.? What the hell. My list of writing material is minimal for this issue. On the other hand, to me, this is incredible.

You should have witnessed the presentation and joy on the face of the barista that handed me this chai latte. As I took my first sip, he informed me it was made from a syrup instead of actual tea bags. I didn’t have the heart to tell him that back at

home in Wisconsin, Erin buys (or used to buy) Starbucks Chai Latte in bulk from Sam’s Club. This was what I have been waiting for ever since I set foot in my first Saudi Starbucks.

Like all things, this is probably too good to be true. Like most things overseas, I will savor this instance and not expect it to last. Next week it will disappear for a few months. It’ll probably be featured on the menu once they have more than 22 to offer the elite Gold Members.

If you ask me, they probably screwed up the order and only got one case for the entire country, then gave each store one liter. Either that or this store received their order and only one showed up because someone at customs was confused or on a power trip, not letting the entire order through.

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## “Finished”, “*khalas*”, “no have”

I’ve been in Starbucks when they’ve had no black tea. This is the Middle East. How can anyone run out of tea?

I’ve been to a restaurant that had no water to go with the meal.

Last week, I went to lunch at a BBQ restaurant with Matt and Stacy. We sat down. The waiter brought us the post-covid-no-paper-menu-pdf-iPad-menu. The first four items we chose were not currently available. An entire section of the menu was basically canceled out because they featured the steaks. No steak. BBQ place. But he didn’t tell us. He simply kept saying “no have”. It’s like a game. Just before I get upset, I simply ask what they actually “DO HAVE to EAT”. After we ordered our foods. We ordered sparkling water. Nope. Just small bottles of water.

We live in a country bereft of alcohol. It hurts to the bone when you keep getting denied basics.



## *Jaded. Been Here Too Long*

**My rants have become so juvenile. They are first world problems that I pick apart now. I've been stuck on this "island" for almost eight years.**

Someone has to point out the small details! Right? Remember. I don't have expectations. I celebrate being surprised if things actually work. I don't expect things to work. That is logical.

These writing rants are simply pent up feelings and observations. My everyday life is simple. No expectations except safety for me and those others I care for. Logic is for going back home.

Here are a few more simple rants.

This starbucks has two glass doors. Only one is ever unlocked. Who knows why? The men's bathroom is busy. I keep my eye on the traffic because I drink a lot of tea (maybe I'll be able to

get more Chai Latte) and need a direct line to relief. A lot of tea goes in. Opposite is true.

But get this! At least once every weekend, for as long as I can remember, I have to ask one of the baristas to check the men's bathroom. The lock mechanism is finicky. Sometimes, it locks without anyone in their.

I watched patrons come and go for two hours once. The bathroom was locked. I just snuck into the women's. Why? I wanted to see how long it would go on. After about two hours, one guy got frustrated of waiting and asked a barista to check the bathroom.

Twice I have let them know this story. Oh well.

# Ranting about streets...

Yesterday, I watched a car turn the wrong way onto a split two-way street leaving Starbucks. An oncoming car came to a crawl while the idiot car steered around them and continued, going obviously the wrong way, to the intersection. Cars in cross traffic, intending to turn into the one-way lane had to wait for twenty cars to pass before the idiot turned out into traffic.

Another incident. I pulled up to a four-way stop sign in a residential area. Remember, this island of expats follows the US rules of traffic. The roads have bilingual signs, sometimes working stoplights, traffic security cameras EVERYWHERE, and the feeling of driving in a small town somewhere in the middle of the United States.

The bisecting roads were two lanes each. Both directions. Hence a four-way stop. Right of way goes to the right based first on timing of the car to reach the intersection first. Text book driver's ed (in the USA). I pull up third. Oncoming lane has three piled up. One car each direction on the bisecting road. I want to go left. There is almost a collision as my opposite and left-hand car get into a start-stop "who goes next" dance. The cars work it out and I pull up to the stop sign in succession BEFORE my opposing lane does. Obviously, he hasn't even stopped yet so I begin to turn left. Without even stopping, the asshole turns right and almost hits me. His window is open so I yell "ASSHOLE" as I break, mid-turn in the intersection. Believe it or not, this local island citizen slows down and pulls over to say something. I had headphones in. Couldn't hear him as I passed by. Bring it on. There are cameras everywhere. He had run the stop. Nothing came of it. He gunned the engine as I turned and he passed through my exhaust. Asshole. **Everything APPEARS to be civilized here. It's not.** More and more visitors, drivers, and people that just don't give a shit are on the roads. First world problem.

In other countries I've lived, I would never have blinked. In most countries, the biggest vehicles do what they want. Darwin. I've just been here too long.

The stoplights here are only outnumbered by cameras. Safety first. Yes, they are on sensors to maximize efficiency of traffic. But sensors malfunction or stop if not maintained. That's the main issue on this island. Maintenance is the downfall of this entire country. No planning for care and maintenance. Put something into place. Forget it. Glorify the fact you have it. Failure is imminent. Certain. Sometimes, the new thing is poorly installed and never even works. Extra parts were not ordered. Or the expert needed to install the item wasn't included. A cheaper worker tried to figure it out.

Back to stoplights on sensors. I spend an inordinate amount of time waiting at intersections when there are no other cars. It's not just me. Not just because the sensor doesn't register a fat guy on a moped. Even if I am behind another car at an intersection. Red light. No oncoming traffic. No walkers.

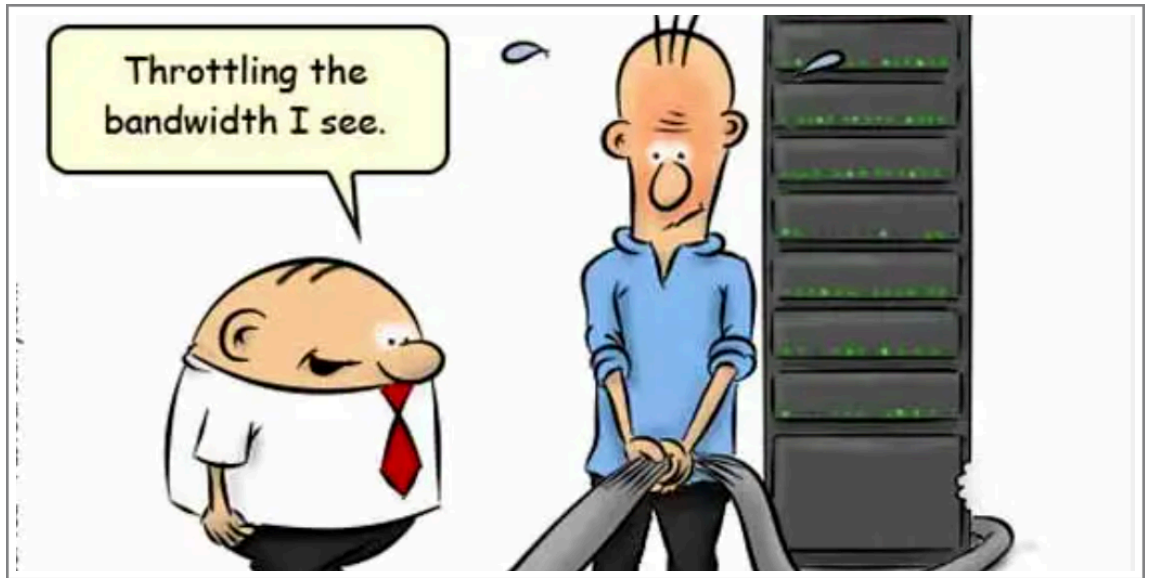
The sensor installers were either held to a maximized safety standard, or more likely, couldn't figure out traffic patterns. Example. You might be the only vehicle at an intersection. Yet, you won't get a green. You might sit there for five minutes waiting for a green light.

One frustrating sensor issue is walkers. Safety is a liability for any big company. Here on the island, walk signals are total. If someone crosses the street at an intersection by hitting the walk signal, ALL of the lights go red and ALL of the crosswalks show a green walk signal. Has no one figured out how irrational this is? The illusion of efficiency is there. The reality is much different. Inefficiency at a highest level.

# Greg, buy real internet. Heck, I'll go out and buy it for you right now. Please

**There is little we can do about throttling. This is my "story of woes"**

Last night, my internet went out again. I blame the provider! This has to end, but I have so little control over the situation. If I stand by my convictions and opt out of the game, it is game over. I won't have my basic need of internet access met. Better to have unreliable service than no service, I guess.



My story started in 2016. I arrived on the island to a temporary apartment provided by the company. Temp meant one year. The apartment was basically a container with a door and plumbing. No internet. When I went into STC - the monopoly on this island - to get a SIM card for my phone and internet access, I bought them both. Pre-paid because I didn't have the required residency

card or company information. The internet was basically a wireless AP/router - a box with antennas that you plug your computer and devices into or access via wireless. AP is access point. In other words, no wires were going into this temporary house.

The phone SIM, which I still have today, worked just fine. The router sucked. I took it back and

explained to the sales rep it was too slow and wouldn't even download an image. I was stuck in 1997!

The rep just looked at me holding my defective, Chinese knock-off device and said "Khalas. No more available. Just give it some time to warm up. It is good machine. We sell many."

No matter what I said to this man changed his

attitude. I left knowing three things: he had no idea how internet works, he worked for a monopoly and just didn't care. That's two. Lastly, I knew I would never set foot into an STC office or talk to a human from STC again.

The first thing I did at home was throw away the AP. I removed the data SIM and placed it in a spare iPhone. Hotspot at casa del Greg.

When I "re-up" my prepaid service, the speed shoots up for a week (120mb/s). Two weeks later it goes down (60mb/s). The last two weeks it went all the way down (2mb/s) or wouldn't connect.



# Years later...

**June of 2017.** I moved into my permanent 110v apartment, I signed up and started paying \$100 a month from the company. Back then, the company was using STC and passed off all of the services to them too. I couldn't complain internally, they would just route me to the "customer service" of STC or instruct me to go into that same office of hell and talk to a rep. Hell no.

That being said. Most evenings and weekends, internet bandwidth was super slow. Latency would kick in too. No one truly knows how many users are on any branch sharing bandwidth. We just keep paying \$100/month for whatever service is provided. Supposedly, all anyone could tell me was data was "unlimited". What a joke. I never got charged more than \$100. That's the only good news. But neither user experience nor reliability were positive. It was so frustrating. And there really is no other company. Remember, monopoly. Another company owned by the government.

I set up a NAS at home. I installed my own VPN on a locally bought router. And, just to make sure I had options, I still had that data SIM from 2016. Remember, upon arrival, I bought a phone SIM and a Data SIM? Whenever the ISP started to throttle my data - usually two weeks in - I'd re-up my mobile data SIM and use that. I'd only pay for a few weeks to cover the time my home internet was throttled.

Jump ahead to 2020. Just before COVID. The company gave up it's hold on the ISP. Probably got sick of being involved. The ISP announced fibre optic 5G being installed! Another joke. There was very little change in services. The worker just showed up one day at my apartment and made a big deal about unplugging the dsl modem that was next to my landline phone. He made an even

bigger production about unboxing the shiny new modem for me. I think I rained on his parade when I asked him to leave and let me set up my own wifi network. He offered to reset my password to "whatever I want". Nope! Don't let the door hit you on the way out!

I went outside and double-checked the fibre optic leading into the wall. (At least he didn't just open the one window and run the wire through that.) Sure enough. There was about an inch of fiberoptic outer protection stripped off leading to the adapter end. Unprotected. Outside elements have at it. Go ahead. Degrade the connection slowly. Idiot.

I didn't notice a lot of difference. The speeds went up to just over 50mb/s. An improvement, yes. But I still had my data SIM backup and had to use it frequently while I still paid \$100/month.

May of 2023. Almost to present. I moved into a 220v apartment. Naturally, no fibre optic had been installed. Like hell I was going to the office. No way. I prepaid for three months on my data SIM, using a mobile wireless router from school. (it was an emergency mobile "egg" the school had bought ten years prior and hadn't been used since 2019).

**Present Day!** I haven't been into the office since that day I arrived. Last week, my internet speeds went down to 2mb/s. I was livid.

The proverbial straw that broke the camel's back happened when I was unable to join the ITP interview. "Greg. Just buy real internet. Heck, I'll go out and buy it for you right now. Please." While the interview was going on, I went on a rampage in my apartment. This was defcon 5. Here I am, the "techie". The celebrated tech whiz in my school. No internet at home.



## My Second Office Visit

**“You have to turn off your router and reset it. Easy. Let me show you.”**

I cannot make this shit up!

Here’s the story wrap up. The fiasco with not making the meeting due to latency and data speeds drove me batshit crazy. While my cohosts were online interviewing and kent was making fun of his techie friend that was too cheap to buy (what he calls) “real internet”, I was disconnecting everything on my apartment network.

I turned everything off. All load was removed from the internet. I tried calling STC. Put on hold. Connected and told everything was “normal” on their end. Bullshit.

I went onto their app via their website at a snails pace and started writing an email to their help desk. After composing a 300 word tirade, the screen went black and a message

came up stating I had written more than their 250 character limit. I was kicked out of their site and asked to log back in with credentials.

Their chat-bot was AI. Based on LLM. However, i think a 5 year old boy was training their AI chat bot. I wrote three prompts asking for guidance to slow service speeds. The pseudo English responses were terribly, grammatically painful. I went to sleep mentally preparing myself for the inevitable office visit.

I had two missions at the office. One, buy a newer mobile router to boost the 5G. Two, arrange for my home fibre optic to be installed again. At the tail end of their lunch break, which is notoriously well past the official 11:30-12:30, I entered with my national ID, passport, cash, credit card, corporate address, home address, and my old router. I was ready.

I sat there for 20 minutes while one sales rep drank tea at his desk and the other frustrated “helped” a customer. I spent my time doing a speed test on my laptop. (4mb/s)

Tea man helped the customer before me and I landed with a smile in front of the other guy. I explained my frustration with internet. He listened, took my information, and started texting on his phone. I’m pretty sure he told someone to clear the cache on my ISP account and stop throttling me for a while.

“The internet should be fine. There is nothing wrong with our internet. You have to reset your router.”

“I did.” I replied after taking a deep breath. “But that doesn’t solve the bandwidth, speed, or even the latency. My outside PINGs have four times the normal latency than ever I’ve seen before.”

“What is PING?”



# Hell. This is hell. Save me. Deep breath!

He continued with a smile. "You misunderstand sir. I do not mean the power. There is a reset button beneath the battery. Let me show you." He reached for the 4g router that was still on his desk.

I cannot make this shit up! I simply put my old router egg back into my bag.

"Do you have any 5g mobile routers, like my old one, that I can buy right now?"

Yes, yes.

While he went into the back room to retrieve the router, I did a quick speed check on my laptop to see if I was correct about his text.

Sure enough. The speeds were back up to about 90mb/s. Waiting for tea man, it had been 5mb/s. I decided not to mention it to Mr. Ping. Instead, I sat there while he played with his phone to look up the price of the device he was about to sell me.

Imagine. The salesman didn't even know the price of this mobile wireless router. They probably only have one kind of mobile router and one kind of wired router. This place hadn't changed in the past seven years. Oh, there are only two guys at desks. Usually there were four or five guys drinking tea while all of the waiting customer seats were filled.

Do I sound spiteful?

When he finally found the 300 dollar price point, I waved him off and told him I wasn't finished and needed more of his expertise.

I explained to him that I had moved apartments during the 110v to 220v conversion phase 4. He seemed to understand.

"So we just need to activate the fibre optic for you?"

I frowned. "Uh, no. There IS no fibre optic going into the apartment."

"Oh, ok. Khalas. Easy. We will have to make an appointment to install the fibre optic."

"Yes please. Here is my ID, Passport, Address..."

"Oh. I don't need any of that. Just share a picture of your address sign. Just send it to my phone now."

"A PICTURE of my address?"

"Yes sir. That is how the technician knows where to install the fibre optic."

Who has a picture of their address plaque on their phone? WFT? This bent my brain a little too far. I had accomplished my first goal. It was time to get back to school.

I paid Mr. Ping for my new router and got outta there knowing three things for sure:

1. my account cache was flushed and back into the midway range
2. the new router would have better range and possibly provide the 5G - doubt it.
3. I would have to come back again.

The event has also shed light on the fact I will opt to go back with a picture of my address. I need to have the fibre optic as a backup for the egg router. If one of them works, I'll be pleasantly happy. Buying both will set me up for paying the devil ISP \$200 monthly, double, but it will give me peace of mind. I can afford it.

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## Final Thoughts

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This was quite the rant issue. I feel better.

Now, it's back to reality. This was written three days after the internet office visit. The router indeed has better range. Worth \$300. No. Needed? Probably. I just need a contact (with influence) at STC. Not Tea man. That's for sure. I still haven't taken a photo of my address.

