

Just a Bunch of Crazy Ideas

Pardu S. Ponnappalli

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Pardu S. Ponnappalli, an IT specialist with a doctorate in physics, has devised ingenious and potentially world-changing ways to improve such things as dishwashers, the next Star Trek movie, laptops, and cat-litter disposal, to name a few of the wide variety of topics he documents in *Just a Bunch of Crazy Ideas*.

Many of Ponnappalli's essays are intellectually challenging, short, well written, and entertaining. Unfortunately, a few of them go on a tad too long and degenerate into mundane personal details that hinder one's enjoyment of his creative mind. That said, *Just a Bunch of Crazy Ideas* is worth slogging through to reach the gems of the author's literary smorgasbord. His first essay is a fascinating plan that proposes a simple, though breathtakingly ambitious and expensive, method of building a space elevator that would take people miles into the sky. Ponnappalli claims his idea of alternating side-by-side structural and commercial skyscrapers could be implemented with existing technology and would be a tremendous boom to the country that attempted it.

The second essay suggests a simple way the government could implement an incentive program to compel people to conserve energy through climate control systems. And in the third piece, Ponnappalli conceives of a method to modify the average automobile, allowing it to convert its size from two to four passengers, for a potential savings of five to ten percent in gasoline usage due to reduced mass. Later essays are about making chess and professional hockey more interesting by adding another row to the chess board and another player to the hockey rink, respectively.

Chapter ten, the longest essay in the book, is a glimpse into Ponnappalli's ongoing struggles with dieting, exercise, and diabetes, titled "I am Overweight and So Are Most Americans." He shares his ups and downs with a frankness that is a joy to read, except when his story gets bogged down by charts documenting the his day-to-day calorie consumption and blood-sugar levels on a restrictive diet of mostly soup. Ponnappalli's frustrated attempts to stay on course, thwarted by tempting foods, good wine, and family functions, are issues nearly everyone can relate to.

Just a Bunch of Crazy Ideas closes with several short chapters on expanding space exploration, profiting in the stock market, reducing production-inhibiting interruptions of IT workers, hiker safety, and making a dishwasher for people with bad backs. They are all satisfying to read, and Ponnappalli's enthusiasm for each topic is refreshing and can't help but pique one's interest in looking at the stuff of life with a more creative eye.

PATTY SUTHERLAND (June 28, 2011)

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