

Ignorance at Play

By Madi Keyes

Publisher Nicholas Ling said, "Ignorance is a voluntary misfortune." In Ray Bradbury's story *A Sound of Thunder*, it's obvious how ignorance is a misfortune, but voluntary. Eckels had the opportunity to travel in time, yet was utterly clueless of the *Tyrannosaurus rex* that he had paid for to hunt. He was ignorant. There's the science to travel in time, so there must be an almost perfect understanding of these dinosaurs.

Books published and documentaries, yet Eckels knew nothing of the prehistoric beast. He panicked, so he made a giant mistake. "Eckels, not looking back, walked blindly to the edge of the Path, his gun limp in his arms, stepped off the Path, and walked, not knowing it, in the jungle" (Bradbury 1128). The company is at fault too, their ignorance towards the risk of their company is obvious. If a modern human can't even step on the grass during the expedition, why risk going back at all? Mr. Eckel's ignorance cost his life and changed history, so why risk it? Eckels and the company's ignorance caused a major impact on Humankind. Their ignorance affected their ability to see the consequences of their actions. In turn, Eckels caused a major shift in mankind and his own fate.

Eckels arrived at the Time Safari Inc. building ready to hunt. Not safely, but ready to hunt. This ignorance would cost him everything in the end. Eckels paid 10,000 dollars to hunt the infamous *tyrannosaurus rex*, a 20ft tall beast weighing in at 31,000 pounds (15.5 tons). Eckels didn't know that though, he was totally void of information about the dinosaur he was hunting. He came unprepared, but when given the chance to rip up his check he declined. Once Eckels did reach prehistoric times, he was given clear instructions. Stay off the path, but Eckel's ignorance seems to override that one rule. It was time, the T-Rex was stomping towards them,

but it was nothing like Eckels thought. “I didn’t realize it would be this big,” said Eckels. “I miscalculated, that’s all. And now I want out” (Bradbury 1128). On his way back to the machine, Eckel’s ignorance would be more dangerous than the dinosaur he ran from.

The story is set in a time period where time travel is possible, but the use of it is pure entertainment. The amazing invention is used for trophy hunting. In every time travel movie and book, the attempt is dangerous and often ends badly. Even the guides in the *Sound of Thunder* understand the danger of the trips they take every day, yet the company still runs. The head guide Travis warned Eckels of wandering off the path, the dangers of even stepping on the vegetation too much to risk. “Not knowing it, we might kill an important animal, a small bird, a roach, a flower even, thus destroying an important link in a growing species” (Bradbury 1125). If even killing a single flower is risking the future, why risk going back at all? Are they ignorant enough to ignore the danger for the sake of wealth?

When the brain experiences stress, panic, or fear, it does what is called an acute stress response. It’s more commonly known as the fight-or-flight response. During a panic attack- which Eckels was probably experiencing after seeing the T-Rex for the first time- the part of the brain that deals with fear, the amygdala, freezes up in a way. When that freezes up, the whole body is impacted, the heart and movement included.

When Eckels started back to the machine, he wandered off the path. His brain wasn't functioning, as usual, so his wandering off didn't progress in his brain. “Eckels, not looking back, walked blindly to the edge of the Path, his gun limping in his arms, stepped off the Path, and walked, not knowing it, in the jungle” (Bradbury 1128). Eckel’s obliviousness distracted him from the usually insignificant creature that was in his way, so he stepped on the butterfly, killing it.

He wasn't thinking, so the warnings from the guides didn't pass through his head. Once Eckels did manage to make his way back to the time machine, it didn't take long for the consequences of his actions to kick in. First, Travis threatened to leave him there, as punishment for leaving the path. Then, when they made it back to the present- Eckels was brought back.

Everything looked the same but was different at the same time. The sign that memorized Eckels earlier was misspelled horribly. The air was different, it had a chemical smell now. Eckels' adventure off of the path changed the future, a single butterfly caused what looked like a nuclear war of some sort. Unfortunately, that wasn't the only consequence of Eckel's ignorance. "He heard Travis breathe loudly in the room; he heard Travis shift his rifle, click the safety catch, and raise the weapon. There was a sound of thunder" (Bradbury 1131).