

Washington, D.C. I think we need a Constitutional amendment saying that the right to suck dry the stupid via games of chance shall revert to the individual states. The Federal government must limit itself to sucking dry the stupid with taxes.

THE MT VOID

Page 2

We all know that lotteries were historically a gift by the Federal government to the states. The Feds recognized that numbers racketeers were sucking the stupid dry with lotteries. To be nice to the states they suppressed the non-governmental numbers runners and handed the right to run a numbers racket over to the states. They also supported the principle that if something appears to be a crime, government has the option of wiping it out or taking it over. It is like Britain fighting a war for the right to push opium in China or Congressmen giving themselves the right to bounce checks. The government gave the suck-the-stupid-dry concession to the states who have been happily running it except where the churches have been muscling in with a lottery called BINGO.

Then things were okay for awhile between the states and the Feds until we got in a certain President. So as not to point any fingers we will designate this party "R." This President said, "A lot of my best friends are rich and a lot of the states' governors are from Party D. Here is my plan: come out for cutting taxes--everybody likes it when you cut taxes--and we will just fund the states less." So that's what he did. At which point Congress stood up in anger and indignation and said, "We need cheaper haircuts at the Congressional barbershop." If a Congressperson was asked about whether it was fair to cut all those Federal programs to help states, the response was, "Son, nobody votes against a tax cut.... Oh fudge, I was talking to you and just missed a chance to vote against a Congressional pay hike. Darn it all!"

So the governors complained to the Fed about the funding cut and the Fed suggested the states increase the number of digits in their lottery numbers. The states did that but they also had to raise taxes. Suddenly it was discovered that Americans were now spending fewer dollars on education per capita than they were on bumper stickers complaining about their governors. This, of course, cheered everybody up because they never really liked education

anyway and they love it when they learn spending on education is surpassed by spending on something stupid like cosmetics or Madonna records. But still nationwide the governors who had to raise taxes are seeing bumper stickers mention their name and doing something with hot pincers. They are just about ready to declare war on the Federal government and a National Lottery might be just the spark that would be needed.

2. Well, the time travel contest didn't get very many entries. In fact, it got two. Or rather one and a half, since Bill Higgins says that his should only count as a half, when he says:

"Here's a contest entry for you, or half of one at any rate. I would go back to the debate between the arrogant young Arthur C. Clarke and the erudite don C. S. Lewis, in the Eastgate Pub, Oxford. It was around 1947 or 1948; I don't have the exact date, but research ought to pin it down. I quote from Clarke's "Memoirs of an Armchair

Astronaut (Retired)," in his 1965 book V_o_i_c_e_s_f_r_o_m_t_h_e
S_k_y: 'Both of these fine books [O_u_t_o_f_t_h_e_S_i_l_e_n_t_P_l_a_n_e_t
and P_e_r_e_l_a_n_d_r_a] contained attacks on scientists in
general, and astronauts in particular, which aroused my
ire. I was especially incensed by a passage in P_e_r_e_l_a_n_d_r_a
referring to "little rocket societies" that hoped to
spread the crimes of mankind to other planets. And at the
words: "The destruction or enslavement of other species in
the universe, if such there are, is to these minds a
welcome corollary," I really saw red. An extensive
correspondence with Dr. Lewis led to a meeting in a famous
Oxford pub, the Eastgate. Seconding me was my friend, Val
Cleaver, a space buff from way back (and now chief
engineer of the Rolls-Royce Rocket Division). Supporting
Lewis was Professor J. R. R. Tolkien, whose trilogy T_h_e
L_o_r_d_o_f_t_h_e_R_i_n_g_s created a considerable stir a few years
ago. Needless to say, neither side converted the other,
and we refused to abandon our diabolical schemes of
interplanetary conquest. But a fine time was had by all,
and when, some hours later, we emerged a little unsteadily
from the Eastgate, Dr. Lewis's parting words were "I'm
sure you're very wicked people--but how dull it would be

if everyone was good."

I have always thought that a videotape of this debate would be a really neat thing to have. I find both of the principals fascinating, and I'm pretty interested in their seconds, too. In particular, Lewis's criticism of British scientific materialists was ignored by most of them, but it seemed to disturb Clarke deeply. I'd like to see them meet and debate each other.

(To pin down the date, you need to burgle the papers of the golden-throated Willis Conover, the Voice of America jazz DJ. Conover was a fanzine editor in the 1930s, and "For the last twenty years," according to a footnote in Clarke's A_s_t_o_u_n_d_i_n_g_D_a_y_s, "the wretch has been sitting on my own extensive correspondence with C. S. Lewis and Lord Dunsany, promising to edit it real soon.")

I'm not really up to the second challenge yet. I'll let you know if I think of nine more events."

Tom Russell, on the other hand, did think of ten events. Actually, he came up with several:

"Ten-Trip Plan 31: I would start a new business: "Have G.U.T., Will Time Travel," and sell quantum leap-frog trips to guys in white hats and women in red dresses (it's my business). Of course I really have grand unified nothing (gun) in case I run out of guts on some trip

opportunities.

Ten-Trip Plan 42: I would produce a new television series, "Lifestyles of Infamous Bitches," a reeeeeeally offensive program which takes you to see some of history's temptresses and seductresses. On our program will be the likes of: Delilah (The Barber of Philistia), Helen (of 1000 Love Boats), Cleopatra (Real Jewel of the Nile), and Mata Hari (The Spy Who Loved A to Z). What is our secret for getting those really great scenes on tape, when we

have only one "take" for each siren we're visiting? The answer is in the near future ...

Ten-Trip Plan 53: Another TV Show, "Solved Mysteries: This Was Your Life, You Were There When It Could Be Told to America's Least Wanted." On this show viewers call 900 numbers to choose which Kennedy fiasco they want to learn the truth about on one week; on another they get to choose which Bermuda triangle disaster to unravel; on the third they get to select which alleged Close Encounter of the Third Kind gets tested; etc. We select one caller at random from those selecting the winning choice to join our host as the videotape is removed from the time machine for its live replay to the television audience. Geraldo, eat your heart out.

To make the show a guaranteed success, we don't go back in time to the actual time and place: rather, we send the machine into the very recent past to a Hollywood sound stage where actors and actresses recreate history the way we want it to have been. Some help from the special effects department can be added to doctor up the videotapes for ETs and yetis. No need to worry about getting to the right place and time, much less having the proper lighting ...

Looking-Back Glass: Well, after rereading the user's manual on my time machine, it turns out not to be a time machine after all. It's more like one of those pay telescopes on the top of the Empire State Building. You get to look, but you aren't really there. This isn't at all like H. G. Wells' or Christopher Lloyd's machines, which actually went somewhen. More like a one-way time window that I can put at any time and place, and then zoom around: like using a microfiche reader to spy on Flatland, but in three dimensions. Spying on our universe, as we know it.

Now the really neat thing about this concept is that I need not worry about how much fuel I'll need to get to my destination (or about polluting the time highways with my

exhaust). Also, I can't be harmed in any way by the scene that I'm viewing. Great! (But let's think about this: how is it, given the duality of everything, that photons can come through the window, but stray bullets cannot?)

I would use this time machine for SETI. Not that I'm a Carl Sagan fan, I just want to know for myself. I would spend the first 24-hour trip looking around our neighborhood. Set the clock for the minimum delta T into the past, just enough to activate the window, and then look around. In one trip I should be able to cover the neighborhood: start at the center of the Sun, proceed out to Mercury for a quick look around, then on to Venus, the Moon, Mars, Charon, Jupiter, Europa, and all the way out to the Oort region. It shouldn't take but a few minutes in each stop to see if there are any artifacts of intelligent life. After all, isn't the Earth covered with empty soda bottles and beer cans?

I would, of course, not be too quick to dismiss an entire planet. I'm thinking of the individual who criticized NASA for sending the Mars probe to land in the desert instead of in the cities.

After the Solar System, then on to the Pleiades, the Magellanic clouds, the local galactic group, etc. Keep expanding the scope of the search.

If ruins of civilization are all that is found, then the time travel capability is what is needed. Go back. How far? Estimate, based on parallels with ruins on Earth: could be 300 years or 3000 years. But be prepared to go back 300 million years.

Ten trips should easily be enough to find intelligent life out there. How can I know for sure? The existence of the time window is enough. It answers two of the most profound questions of cosmology:

Q - "Where are they?"

A - They aren't coming here, they're just looking in the window.

Q - "Where is the missing mass from the universe?"

A - It went out the window.

Of course we don't want to find anybody out there who's too intelligent. That's why looking for beer cans as signs of civilization fits just right."

Mark Leeper
MT 3D-441 908-957-5619

DOWN THE BRIGHT WAY by Ralph Reed
Bantam Spectra, 1991, ISBN 0-553-28923-3, \$4.50.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
Copyright 1992 Evelyn C. Leeper

Another reviewer has recently suggested this as a possible Hugo contender. Well, in this world anything is possible, but I have to disagree on this one. This novel suffers (for me, at any rate) from the same fault as Reed's other novel, B_l_a_c_k_M_i_l_k. (Each, by the way, contains an excerpt from the other at the end of the book, possibly to confuse anyone who might skip to the end to find out what happened.) This fault is that after setting up an interesting premise with a lot of promise, Reed does nothing with it. In D_o_w_n_t_h_e_B_r_i_g_h_t_W_a_y, Reed postulates an infinite number (more or less) of parallel Earths connected by the Bright, a sort of highway that one can travel between them. Millions of years after the creation of the Bright, the Wanderers send out two parties, one in each direction of the Bright, to try to find the Makers who created it. (I find myself asking why the Bright is linear. Some ordering of Earths along a line--a single dimension doesn't seem to make a lot of sense.)

Now to my mind the most exciting possibilities of this story are in the parallel Earths. But these are almost entirely glossed over so that all the rivalries and conspiracies among the Wanderers can be developed. The only time the parallel Earths become important is when Reed needs something to menace the entire set-up. But for that, this seems more like a spy thriller than a sweeping science fiction novel. There's nothing wrong with spy thrillers, but why bother with the science fiction part? It's as though you sent a team of time travelers back to ancient Egypt and then had them sit in their tent arguing about who was the team leader the whole time, pausing only briefly to notice a huge number of frogs, swarms of flies, a rain of fire, a swarm of locusts, and finally what seems to be a large number of people walking by. The team interactions might normally be interesting, but the reader wants to rip open the tent door and go outside.

