

was it nineteen-aught-seven?--and all morning the ground looked white. And over in the corner a kid in overalls with wide eyes says, "White? You mean _ a _ l _ l _ o _ v _ e _ r? Wow!" And even there people think spring is best. I mean, lots of people say they like the change of the seasons, but even they are happy to be rid of winter. I have people say they like winter, but these are mostly all skiers

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who wait for the coldest season, go up to high elevations where it is colder still, and then shoot downhill at high speed so they can get all this cold air blowing right past them. They only do this because similar pursuits such as self-flagellation have gone out of style.

But anyone whose balance is not over a pair of skis is happy to see winter end and spring come. It is sort of an emotional windfall. And naturally, rare is the windfall--emotional or financial--that the United States government doesn't try to diminish. So naturally this is the time of year they have you fill out your income tax. After all, why go outside and hear birds singing when you can be filling numbers in on hopelessly complex forms? Just when you'd like to take out a book and sit under a tree, you are reading some bureaucrat's explanation of which schedule you should be pulling some number off of.

And even that I could understand, but also every company I own stock in--people who were content to leave me alone when I wanted a distraction from mowing the lawn or raking leaves or shoveling snow--suddenly decides in the spring they want to impress me with how well the company is doing. They send me these big thick annual reports. The first thing they want to convince you is that the beautiful people use their products. I mean, these things are chock full of pictures of people using their products and in twenty years of seeing these things I haven't seen one pimple, not one mole. Very occasionally you see a scientist whose hair isn't combed. If they want to represent someone as "jes' plain folks," they put a pair of glasses on them. I feel like asking them, "Doesn't anyone who looks like me ever use your products? Guys like me could be a whole untapped market." Sometimes these reports show you the president of the company or the CEO, but only if he--and it seems always to be a he--can be made up to look like one of

the other mindless mannequins that show up in the pictures. This guy--usually on the board of directors--grins at the readers as if to say, "We jes' _ l_ o_ v_ e our stockholders." That way you are just so bubbling over with good will towards the directors you don't bother reading the pages and pages of tables of tiny numbers toward the back. Besides, if you wanted to read tiny numbers, you'd be doing your taxes.

But then, when you see what came with the annual report, the honeymoon is over. There is this ballot with some questions on it for you to vote on. And they give you clear instructions on how to vote and what the directors recommend that you vote. Yup, right there on the ballot they are telling you how they want you to vote. And these are the guys who can wreck the company and make your stock worthless if you make them mad. How'd you like to be voting for President and see a little sign in the voting booth saying, "Sheriff Scruggs, his eight deputies, and his six growling police dogs all recommend you vote for...."

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Then you see the directors' proposals. These are all things like elect all the current directors and approve a new stock plan where whole bunches of new shares of stock will be issued and given to the directors as gifts. Now they know no stockholder in his right mind would do something so stupid as vote for something like this. So if you read the description of the proposal in the little book you will find it couched in phrases such as, "Pursuant to facilitating with dispatch the extromission of the stockholding populace, many of whom are endued with a propensity to vitilitigate...." Of course, in these guys' notes to one another they often confuse "to," "too," and "two." On all of these the directors tell you they recommend you vote "yes."

Next you come to the shareholder proposals and the whole "we jes' _ l_ o_ v_ e our stockholders" attitude goes down the porcelain receptacle.

Now I have been reading these ballots since I was a teenager and in all that time, to hear the directors tell it, _ n_ o_ t_ o_ n_ e_ s_ t_ o_ c_ k_ h_ o_ l_ d_ e_ r_ _ h_ a_ s_ e_ v_ e_ r_ h_ a_ d_ a_ g_ o_ o_ d_ i_ d_ e_ a. They always recommend you vote "no." I don't care what the stockholder is proposing, the directors assume anyone who owns shares is a nitwit. If they weren't nitwits they

would have voted the directors out years before. They figure if the idea didn't come from them, it cannot possibly be any good. I have seen cases where one proposal says the company should do X and the next is that it should not do X, and the directors will recommend you vote against both! Those poor East Berliners don't know what they've let themselves in for.

2. Members of Chicon V should be reminded that the deadline for Hugo nominations is April 10--that's less than a week away! [-ecl]

Mark Leeper
MT 3D-441 957-5619
...mtgzy!leeper

The public is wonderfully tolerant. They forgive everything but genius.

-- Oscar Wilde

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