

Among the Dupes and Scoundrels

I woke suddenly and looked at my watch. It was 3 a.m., or just after. The Omaha-to-San Francisco Greyhound bus had chugged to a stop and its motor was silent. The lights inside the bus had been turned on. The passengers were debarking with unusual haste. Momentarily puzzled in my state of drowsy nescience I roused up to peer out into the night. After traveling in the dark down miles of winding highway amid tumbles of dimly seen mountains, we seemed to have arrived in the midst of carnival. I glimpsed swirls of colored lights, brightness, movement. The 3 a.m. darkness had opened like the door of a fiery furnace.

Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and the rest of the passengers were rushing into the heart of that seething magic. I hoped that they were as inviolate as the Hebrew children. I read the name above the glittering portals of the place, and all became clear. We were at a Nevada casino. We were evidently just barely across the state line, but we were across it nevertheless. This was a rest stop for the passengers, but of course none of them intended to rest for a minute.

As soon as they all had descended from the bus, I followed much more sedately. "The least the bus could do," I grumped to myself, "is stop at the Cottontail ranch." But here we were at a casino where in the darkest hour of the morning the lights were twinkling like a Thrifty drugstore in Los Angeles. In the cool desert night the stars were twinkling too, but the nearer lights had much the best of it. The Nes-selrode glare festooned the scene where one expected only sagebrush and silence. The place certainly was showy.

I wambled slowly inside to behold an amazing sight. The bus passengers, mingling with a throng of other people, were already hopping madly here and there like wallabies among the slot machines that crammed the room to the very doors. In a swoon of wonder I paced up and down the aisles with my hands thrust into the pockets of my tattered Carhartt jacket, the only hands in the whole casino that were not occupied in feeding coins and pulling levers. I had unexpectedly invaded a strange world that I alone was not a part of. I felt so much a solitary alien that I half-expected that things around me would give way and collapse as with Richard le Breton and Reginald Fitzurse. But nobody paid me any attention. Everybody was playing the slots with the single-minded devotion of a water witcher and (I suppose) just as vainly.

Somehow I was miserably pleased that I was here to see it. The whole scene reminded me of pleasures, long ago and more innocent, in the



NO. 3

APRIL 1984

way that a sour belch at midnight may remind one of a dinner partaken hours before. I remembered the tawdry but alluring charm of a traveling carnival, a small rag-show I visited in my youth. I was even happy that all these people, who otherwise would be sleeping in their beds in Medford, Oregon, or Grass Valley, California, were busily making merry at 3 a.m. The brief sling of unconventionality for these ordinary people amused me. But I wanted no part of it.

After a while I departed the casino and walked a little in the open air, far enough down the road that the stars shone a bit brighter. "What's the matter with you?" I asked myself sternly. "You, of all people, are a prude! A bluenose! You really do object, don't you, to these tourists having fun?"

"No no!" I replied hastily. "Here I am talking to myself like Mr Flood -- and in fact, I wouldn't object at all if the people in there were getting as joyously drunk as old Eben. Or if indeed we had stopped at the Cottontail ranch.... At least then you'd be getting some momentary pleasure in exchange for your bucks. But throwing money away on the slots! What a mad milking time it is. I do object to people being lured to squander hard-earned money so carelessly and foolishly -- with the Greyhound company in cahoots. There ought to be a law!"

I squared away and walked more briskly back to the bus. "By god," I vowed (and this is a vow I kept), "I will not contribute to it! I will not spend a single dime while I am in Nevada." I did not of course suppose that the state will go broke as a result of my boycott.

Lost in the Ganch Dimension

I am a science fiction fan. Or am I? For more than 40 years, going on 50, I have thought of myself as a fan, but in To the Stars, a fancy fanzine published, I think, by the Trimbles, I read an ad headed "Become a visible fan!" and began to wonder a good deal. Am I really a fan? Do I want to become visible? The ad included a "data form" to fill out in order to get listed in a Fandom Directory issued by an outfit called Fandom Computer Services. Using a Radio Shack personal computer they compile and then sell mailing lists to groups and individuals.

Skimming down the "Status" list in the "data form" I scratched my head a lot, like the girl in the shampoo commercial, but not for the same reason. The Directory offered me the choice of being listed as a dealer, writer, publisher, store, or manufacturer, among other categories. Well, I suppose you can run a store or sell Star Trek T-shirts by mail order and still be a fan. Over the years, and in the long run, I haven't made a nickel out of fandom. But then, it's mostly my own fault. I have stayed an amateur (if not a fan) by choice and bent.

It was the other list in the coupon that really startled and sobered me. The list was headed "Interests," and contained four columns of categories, 58 choices in all, in addition to "Other (specify)." I'm supposed to check such "interests" I have as a fan. In filling out the form (which I haven't sent in, by the way) I dubiously checked off half a dozen categories, wondering at the same time what they had to do with fandom: Westerns, Old Time Radio, Gum Cards, for instance. Why not

stamp collecting, beer cans, and tatting? Some categories I couldn't even figure out: Good Girl Art, Silver Age, Golden Age, D & D, Plastic Bags, and others. I have no idea what these "interests" are. Is it the girl or the art that's good? Is D & D anything like S & M? Am I a Plastic Bag fan? I use plastic bags, but I am not wild about them, so presumably I am not. I am a Jiffy Bag fan, a category not listed.

I suspect that what's wrong with fandom these days (there is always something wrong with fandom) is that it has melded with these other hobby groups and failed to retain an identity of its own. I am not against other hobbies. I remember that, in a way, science fiction fandom itself grew out of radio- and electrical-experimenter fandom in the Gernsback magazines of the 1920s. Whatever its origin, sf fandom is unique, and in this universe of intermingling hobbies we ought to put fresh emphasis on the traditions that are peculiar to our own fandom. I enjoyed a letter from Jack Speer last summer in which he used scientific-combinations and Ackermanese. Hardly anybody uses them anymore. Nobody worships FooFoo, or hardly even Roscoe. Nobody debates learnedly the arthropodal existence of Yngvi.

I think I'm a science fiction fan, but probably I am not. After all, I have never seen "Star Trek," not a single episode, let alone the movie version. I have never seen "Star Wars" or its sequels, or even "E.T." I did see "Raiders of the Lost Ark," canned by the same factory, and was so bored and appalled by such malignant cinema art that I have no desire to see the sf films.

Except by sheer chance I haven't read any of the Hugo or Nebula winners of the past 20 years. The current science fiction I did read during those two decades was often wearisome and sometimes repellent. I started reading sf because I was interested in the future of the human race. (It seemed to have a future in those days.) I am not much interested in stories about imaginary alien worlds somewhere out in the galaxy. There are a few exceptions (The Legion of Space, Skylark III, Mission of Gravity, The Triumph of Time, even some of the Darkover stories), but generally I want to read about the future of Earth or at least of the solar system. I prefer stories where imagination has to be shaped and disciplined by the inconveniences of reality. The other stuff is fairy tales. I outgrew fairy tales, except for a few nostalgic backward glances, when I was ten years old. My fannish enthusiasm for sf has cooled to a lukewarm velleity.

But I am happy in my ignorance. Please don't force upon me a copy of Battlefield Earth. Don't offer to pay my way to see "The Ice Pirates" or "Android." Above all, don't send me any plastic bags, although Jiffy Bags are welcome. I suppose I am not a science fiction fan. If I am, I prefer to be invisible.

The Light That Failed

On Thursday afternoon, 19 May 1983 -- just about a year ago -- the bulb of my makeshift mimeoscope blinked out forever. That sounds like a minor incident, but it was actually a historical moment. The bulb, in its holder/reflector, was the original bulb that came with the "real" mimeoscope that I bought second-hand from Miller-Davis office supply in

Minneapolis. I used the mimeoscope extensively till 1962, when I came west. Then I had to leave the rest of the apparatus behind, but I detached the bulb and brought it along. Over the years in Los Angeles and Berkeley, in a series of improvised mimeoscopes, it continued to glow while being used by myself and other people. I would hate to count the hours I bent over it, wielding stylus and lettering guides. But early in May 1983, while I was doing the heading for The Volunteer Committee to Bring Back the Ping Bar (SAPS mailing #144), I noticed that its light had grown yellow and dim, and then at last it burned out.

Dave Rike lent me his classy homemade mimeoscope for a while, then I found a replacement bulb. It is very similar to the old one, clear-glass and tubular, manufactured for use in refrigerators. It works well so far, but I'll bet they don't make bulbs like they used to. The old bulb was bought sometime in 1952, and burned faithfully for 31 years.

Out of Step

I don't mind in the least how you step to the music, but....

Sometimes I wear my hair long and shaggy, down around my ears, mostly because haircuts are so expensive and because I detest barber shops, but I think long hair is uncomfortable and often unsightly. I can't figure out why any man would wear his hair long by choice. (Women are another matter.) I have grown a beard a few times in my life, but what a relief it was to shave it off! What discomfort and inconvenience a beard is! I never intend to grow another.

I am fully in sympathy with women's rights, but I don't comprehend how referring to a woman by her last name, without a title, e.g., calling TV actress Shelley Long merely "Long" instead of "Ms Long" in an article about "Cheers," contributes to the cause. (This was formerly done, in England, only in referring to women of low repute, such as those convicted of crimes.)

I drink coffee and Coca-Cola because of, not in spite of, the caffeine. For a headache I take a couple of aspirins instead of Tylenol or its imitators. Aspirin is one of the greatest medical discoveries of all time. It's not only more effective than Tylenol, it's also much cheaper. I am not really fond of beer, but if you do like beer why would you drink "light beer"? Does Morgan Botts drink light beer these days? I think grape juice is so tasty that it's a shame they ferment so much of it into wine.

I like sugar. Certainly it tastes better than synthetic sweeteners and it may be safer. If nothing else sugar is a source of quick energy for a sweaty task. Before I run off this fanzine I am going to eat a Hershey's.

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