

Dazed and confused

Eavesdropping on local bar scene doesn't uncover much



It was with a great sense of hesitancy that I took the assignment. As I recall, the conversation transpired something like this:

"Good God, man, what do you mean infiltrate the bar scene? It's just not my bag. Surely, you must be joking."

"Well," the voice on the other end of the phone said, "this week it is your bag, you're my bagman, got it? And don't..."

"Yeah, yeah, don't call you Shirley, Temple."

"Look," the voice continued, getting as frustrated with me as a zebra with bad contrast, "it should be simple for a guerrilla of your caliber."

"What, 45?"

"Oh, ha ha. Just do it. Besides, maybe you'll find some achingly beautiful sorority girl who's too drunk to realize that you're you."

"Great, that's a comforting thought," I said as I slammed down the receiver.

This wasn't the kind of job I preferred to do, but I didn't seem to have much of a choice.

Never, however, go on such a deadly assignment like this without backup. A phone call later, my erstwhile assistant, whom I shall refer to as The Fork, was suiting up to guard my back. I don't really need a bodyguard as people rarely attack my body, but there are a lotta back-stabbers after me.

Our journey began early on a Thursday night, as we ventured into lands best left unnamed.

I'd tell you which place we went into, friend, but you wouldn't believe me and I don't want them after me (again), so suffice to say it was on "The Strip."

Now, The Fork told me that "The Strip" was nicknamed such for its, well, stripiness. Most of the bars in down-

town Lincoln are located along O Street in a line. Strip was not a verb, although it would have made a better evening if it had been.

The Fork and I found ourselves a pair of stools, a pair of glasses with lots of ice and a spot where we could be flies on the wall for a night.

The first fringe drinker of the evening walked into the bar at about 5:30 p.m. "Woo-hoo!" he hollered, "Let the weekend begin!"

"Doesn't he know the weekend hasn't started yet?" I asked the bartender.

"Buddy," the bartender told me as he began to pour the man a drink, "the weekend doesn't start and end for these folks - it's just one continuous flow. They drink to forget that they're drinking to forget something."

I glanced over at The Fork. "I think I've finally figured this thing out."

"Whazzat?" he shoots back.

"People say your college years are the best years of your life... because no one really remembers them."

"Could be, could be."

Time passes...

At 8:30 p.m., things have begun to pick up. The bar is, for the most part, full. The Fork and I have gone through rivers of water, and the whole place has begun to get a little disturbing.

The stool next to me had been claimed by a woman dressed in her Saturday best.

I find it odd that people who plan to get drunk enough to lose control are dressed in their best clothes. Apparently this is some part of the system I don't yet understand.

Anyway, she spent two hours telling me all about her ex-boyfriend (whom she continuously referred to as John "the Asshole" - like John the Baptist) and the problems they had.

Normally, I try to be sympathetic. But I ask a few things in return. The first is that you speak some semblance of English. After nine Coronas, I'm not sure this girl could even spell English.

The other is that you talk to my face, not to the reflection of my face in the bartop in front of you.

Eventually, she left and wandered over to another table, begging the Asshole to take her home, which he did.

I must confess, as bad as my situa-

tion was, I felt a little sorry for The Fork, though.

Next to him sat Martha. Martha had just been released from prison and on one set of knuckles she had the word "PAIN" tattooed and on the other set she had "FEAR."

Did I neglect to mention that Martha was 6-foot-7, 285 pounds? And she was all over The Fork like ugly on an ape. Extend the man a hand, ladies and gents, I couldn't have lived through that.

Time passes...

At just about midnight, things had descended from amusing into total madness.

Someone had smuggled a horse into the men's bathroom, and several guys were attempting to elect it to a senator slot.

A gaggle of girls were attempting the "step-step-step-kick" Rockettes maneuver, but it was coming across more like "stagger-fall-

"*I find it odd that people who plan to get drunk enough to lose control are dressed in their best clothes.*"

crack-break." I think it was more entertaining that way.

The worst part, however, was the drunken chorus doing "Louie, Louie." You could understand them, that's how drunk they were.

Time passes...

Every wild night comes to an end eventually, and this one was no different. The Fork and I, neither of us having touched a drop all night, wandered out in the street to see the conclusion of the havoc.

One man had collapsed into the bushes, and three of his friends were working at pulling him up.

A woman had removed most of her clothing and was trying to squeeze into the sunroof of a slowly accelerating car.

The horse, having lost in its bid for the Senate to a Republican rat, was trying to flag down a taxi.

And me? I bid farewell to the Streets of Puke and Urine, got in my car and set course for a greater magic. I ran out of gas near Avalon.

The journalism guerrilla lacked targets this time. Corruption hides well. Reveal it. Any communiqués for the rebel journalist should be sent to journalisticwarfare@hotmail.com. Pleas for mercy will be duly ignored.



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Zero tolerance

Successes of secret societies were rooted in mystery



In 1307, when Philip the Fair finally broke into the strongholds of the Knights Templar of France, he expected to find at least his share of the vast fortune the Templars were known to have possessed.

(Certainly Philip himself was in deep to the Templars, owing them more than even the King of France could ever repay.)

But he did not find it.

So it was with a certain disgust and more than a touch of superstitious dread - that he pursued the torture and execution of so many of that heroic, monastic order.

Where had all the money gone? To this day, rumors and myths to the effect that secret warnings had alerted the Templars (who sent ships laden with gold to some secret hiding place, perhaps to finance a hideous, if long-and-drawn-out, revenge) circulate among those who

like to believe rumors and myths.

Who were the Templars? What was the secret knowledge they possessed that gave them financial power over kings and popes?

More tellingly: What was the connection between the Templars and that other secret society, the Free Masons, by whose skill the great cathedrals of Europe were constructed?

I have my own theory.

The Templars were founded during the Crusades.

A monastic order, committed to the protection of pilgrims traveling the treacherous and thief-riddled passage to the Holy Land, the Templars were known and respected among the local Muslim leaders as devastating warriors who did not hesitate to die in carrying out their duty.

Housed in the environs of the ancient temple of Jerusalem (hence the name), the Templars were also thought to have had certain illicit dealings with their Muslim neighbors: staying up late talking theology, that kind of thing.

And, it was rumored they had discovered there, among the heathen, a vast fortune - perhaps King Solomon's secret treasure, buried beneath their modest dwellings.

Whatever the case, it was soon possible for them to safeguard the goods of pilgrims by means that seemed to indicate vast reserves of wealth.

Simply put: A pilgrim who wished, for his spiritual and perhaps financial edification, to travel to those distant lands would put on deposit a certain sum with his local Templars, who would write him a voucher for the amount, collectable in credit on his safe arrival in Jerusalem.

In short, they had brought banking to Europe.

It was a mysterious concept to the medieval mind, the idea of paper money, and it's easy to see how Philip (or anyone unfamiliar with the complexities of compounded interest) could have assumed there must be gold lying around in great heaps, somewhere.

But there was no gold. Or, rather, the Templars had learned one of the great secrets: Wealth can be abstracted from gold.

The gold was re-invested in the European project. The wealth remained with the Templars. And the secret of the wealth?

For the answer, let us now turn to the Free Masons, that mysterious

and closely guarded guild that held the key to the keystone. Far from the "Rotarian" social clubs of today, the medieval Masons were genuine craftsmen and real-life masons (bricklayers) who knew how to build a stone arch that wouldn't fall down.

Rumored to have been founded by surviving Templars as a lifeboat for the order, the Free Masons commanded huge resources for their "secret" knowledge, indispensable in constructing cathedrals.

They were also known for a nearly heretical mysticism that remained unfathomable to those around them.

What is the connection between these two secret societies? How were they able to preserve their mysteries from all prying eyes?

And, more importantly to the medieval mind, what was their connection to the mysteries and heresies of the East?

To put it in terms that would have baffled their contemporaries, the secret was nothing.

Rather, the secret was no-thing.

It was zero.

The zero of the Arabs (al-sifer in Arabic, from which we derive our "cipher"), which they gathered from Vedic Mathematics, was unknown in

the West.

And because it was unknown, it turned out, for a while, to be unknowable.

Imagine an early Templar, on his return to Rennes-le-Château, trying to tell his fellow parishioners about the great discovery of the Arabs:

"It's nothing! Absolutely nothing! Isn't that amazing?"

Yet zero (and the decimal system) is indispensable for carrying on the calculations of higher mathematics.

The kind of mathematics involved in calculating interest and engineering cathedrals, for instance.

The secret of the Templars and of the Masons was the same. They brought it back with them from the Crusades. It was a secret simply because it literally could not be conveyed to the uninitiated, to a mind not yet conceptually ready for it.

And it was nothing. It was a nothing that changed and ruled the world. And in a "one-centric" society like that of a feudal, monotheistic Europe, it was a heresy most foul.

Next Time: the Secrets of the Pyramids and the Mysteries of Stonehenge.

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