

## The Expert and the Sucker Fish

My wife will attest that over the years I have had a vast number of hobbies and interests, with model building being one of the longest running of them all. I've been involved with music, from garage bands to top-line Vegas stages, professional photography, WW2 reenacting, historical vehicle restorations, you name it and I've probably done. But the world of model building has one distinction that none of the others can boast. That is the unique and ever present expert and authority on the hobby that doesn't ever really seem to actually partake in the hobby. You may know them as the 'Model Experts'.

These guys seem to be everywhere, from coast to coast and they come in all shapes, sizes and age groups. I've never been able to figure these guys out as they never seem to ever build anything. It would be hanging around music stores and recording studios critiquing musicians but never actually ever picking up an instrument to play.

The model expert is not easily recognized at first, because for the unaware modeler they seem like everyone else. But with a little training you too can spot these guys like I can. First thing to look for are little flash lights hung on their belts in little black nylon holsters, little dental mirrors sticking out of their pocket-protectors and lastly the ever present two pairs of glasses. I can't explain why the two pair of glasses unless of course one pair is X-ray powered and can see through plastic and paint to reveal all the wonderful flaws and mistakes carefully hidden away.

But if you want to spot them fast, here is what to look for. The model Expert is usually not dressed very well, kind of like a well-dressed homeless college professor. He'll usually have an entourage consisting of one guy who for whatever reason is impressed by the Experts knowledge of everything, sort of a plastic model sucker-fish. For me, these guys always remind me of the roles played by Peter Lorre in the old black and white movies from the 40's.

The Expert will walk up to the model table and scope out the best kits on the table. When he spots a really good model he'll walk up close and will look and back forth as if he expects the entire room to stop what they're doing and gasp in anticipation of his judgement. He'll casually switch eye glasses (again, I have no idea why) and with the skill and precision of Dirty Harry drawing on a bad guy,

he'll whip out the pen light from the small black holster on his hip and 'click it' on. The Expert imagines the sound of the 'click' reverberating around the room as if he just cocked a .45 M-1911 Automatic. You'll then see his little sucker-fish Peter Lorre looking buddy gleefully rub his hands together in anticipation of what he knows is coming next.

The Expert will bend over slightly in a very dignified manner, run the light over the model, more often than not the best model on the table, and take a second or two to digest the whole thing before standing upright again. He'll look over at Peter Lorre and in a voice just loud enough to be heard at least two tables away he'll fire away like the broadsides of Missouri class battleship. "It's the wrong shade of OD green for August 1944", or "the sand is the wrong color for Tarawa Atoll for November 1943", perhaps even a "the seat belts on a FW-190-d were made of tan canvas, not brown leather". The Peter Lorre looking guy gives him a slight pat on the shoulder and is almost overcome with emotion. He feels lucky to have such a friend and authority on everything.

It's over, that's it, months of work by the builder wasted in a heartbeat. The model has been hereby dismissed as unworthy of The Experts time and experience. It shouldn't even be on the table any more, why doesn't someone come by and remove it, he thinks. With a little luck, a few new guys to the hobby were nearby and witnessed the 'take-down' first hand. The Expert feels he has just done these green-horns a valuable favor. They'll know better now than to try and compete in a hobby that requires countless years of training, expertise in everything and of course two pairs of glasses.

With the destruction over and the smoke settling on the table, The Expert will move on to the next victim. Like the alien tri-pods in War of the Worlds, The Expert will repeat the process over and over again till not a model is left standing tall. With a little luck, the guys running the model show will approach him, realize his greatness and ask him to judge the contest. That's where the real carnage can take place. There will be no winners today. The expert has now been elevated to the position of Lord of the Keep.

I've personally seen this dozens of times over my 40 years of modeling. Some poor soul, someone who kind and sensitive would probably be devastated by being taken down by The Expert. But not me. I was raised on the mean streets of

New York City and being sensitive is an invitation to getting your ass kicked, a lot. I found the best way to deflate The Expert is step up to the guy and in my best Tony Soprano accent ask to see his model. When he proudly confesses that he doesn't have one, you pull out the secret weapon. The equivalent of Kryptonite dropped at Superman's feet. You turn away and as you do you fire-off a carefully crafted and well-rehearsed 'wave-off and puff of disgust'. That's it! Done!

Whether you realize it or not, you may have just saved the hobby. At least some small portion of it. With your take down of The Expert you may have just allowed some new-guys to stick around the hobby and develop their skills, not to mention have some fun. That is after all what the hobby is all about.