

The Fourth Estate

VIII

The Island

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Suffering its own taints, and there are many, the Island resumes itself, despite one's criticisms; and secretly believes it is the best after all.

One day, when the three of us, sailors no less, and old geezers too, had sailed across from the Island to the Big Island and had stopped at a roadside tavern to do as men do after a successful sail, we were approached by one of them. The 'them' in this case were those that were attached to the altered Harley-Davidsons we had seen parked outside as we came in.

This one sauntered away from his group of heavily decaled leather jackets and jerkins, toward us. US? This one had the look and manner of Marlon Brando in one of his motorcycle flicks with Martha Hyer, sporting a pair of narrow blue shades, with his hands shoved into his short bedecaled leather jacket.

He presumed upon us with a nod serving as greeting, then saying something like. "You guys look like you might know somethin'." Motioning with his head, "That Island we can see over there (we were overlooking the water), that Harmony Heaven?" We assented as it might be just that Island.

And we, rather playing it down, let on we might actually live there, rather innocuously.

Other bits of information were passed on in the exchange, meaningless particulars regarding vital statistics, when suddenly the Free Soul inquired after the number of constables that might be found thereupon.

Of course there were none, the Islanders being so well behaved.

It was then he ventured in his best Marlon Brando "We've bin thinkin' uv rentin' a boat in Vancoover an' cummin onup that way."

No comment. "Thanks."

V a r r r r o o o o m m m m!!!

I thought what a laugh it would have provided us to watch the interaction between the Free Souls, and the various polarities upon the Island (who might find some common ground after all). One wondered if they might be, as reputed, linked to Organized Crime?

While they might have heard of the place, as one is apt to hear of such places, creating thereby ill-formed notions, like one, contentedly or discontentedly enjoys, concerning most things in this life, they may have imagined some isolation for conducting a particular indulgence of theirs in sublime privacy.

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Riding their Harleys up and down the Island in the manner of Hells own Angels, and Hells own Free Souls, whether, in racing over the Hot Coals in the Raging Inferno, buzzing by the Halfway House of the Summarily Abandoned in Purgatory, or dawdling by the Happily Condemned Innocents in Limbo, their bizarre, macho, mufflerless, attention-getting cacophony would initially give rise, not to consternation, but such derisive laughter as to upset the coffee on the kitchen table in (Harmony) Heaven.

While it would be their Right, under normal circumstances to be so occupied, on the commons, the dissonant barrage would eventually prove disturbing to the habitat, necessitating action from the Islanders; whether as a group? would prove a most interesting eventuality.

Most likely, the Souls and Angels would perhaps soon be most desirous of the intercession of some authoritative uniformed entity to protect themselves and their 'property' as the islanders either individually, or as a unified whole, attempted through all manner of devious schemes to effectively remedy their intrusive presence.

I cannot imagine their interest in a Constableless Island lest it was uninhabited. Surely these ostentatious recalcitrants must realize what a queer bunch must live on remote islands; hardly their own kind.

We old codgers mused upon the Free Souls, over coffee at the kitchen table. Perhaps we were hallucinating. Perhaps our sail in the little boat, to and from the Big Island had been an hallucination. Perhaps our whole life on the Island was an hallucination. Perhaps the only real things in the world are the vehicles, and the circularly interminable asphalt ribbons over which we navigate in them, like the youngster upon the ferry, or in the arcade along the strip, as he intensely wheels and joy-sticks his Video for a quarter; perhaps on an imaginary Harley, or in an Offenhause, going somewhere, and nowhere simultaneously, as we are all inclined to do. On the Island vehicles go around and around in a very finite way without any hope of escape. One day they die for eternity; they lose their persona, their souls in death, the remainder cannibalized, a self-renewing resource amidst the burgeoning moss and mould.

Thus have we arrived at another resumption; has the Island become itself once again, lazing innocuously, unobserved in the Universe? Hah!, do we wish to be observed?

In men's minds, on distant shores, in distant places, Harmony Heaven becomes merely one of many, of little or no consequence, while the factions within feel impelled to avail the Mary Jane Times. I could reveal the real name(s) of the Times. Wishing to preserve the incognito status of the Island as well as its somewhat unbridled twolegged entities, I have euphemistically labeled the Times as it might represent its nominal factional alignment, or source of all knowingness.

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What impels man to print? That I should ask? What impels man to broadcast his opinion far and wide? Can he not leave a sleeping dog lie? We are dogs, are we not; why ought we be roused by barking, only to further bark and yap our day along.

In its hibernation from the world, the Island only reluctantly severed its ties from reality. There is a noise to life, a sounding first of oneself, then the greater Universe outside; perhaps finding therein a need to distinguish oneself from the abject nothingness of the Nirvana for which one was totally unprepared. Hence these spurious rebirths in print.

I know not the History of Print upon the Island, but since my tenure thereupon, an assortment of flyers have found their way into the mailboxes, purporting to enlighten the Islanders in one particular way or another, in terms sometimes incomprehensible. One such entitled, *How Come?*, in the form of some obscure rant to do with the screwing up of young minds, to which a subsequent T-Shirt brigade responded with, *Who Cares?*. Other circulars involved some seeming spontaneous urgent requirement to pass on information with regard to the Islands Image?, the intrusion of logging, woodlotting, the proposed land swaps between the entrepreneurs (land speculators) and the government, the proposal of selling private lands to the government for Parks, the leasing of foreshore within bays for the purpose of fish-farming, or a host of exploitative maricultural bonanzas, ALL raising a periodic din, and cause to linger and rue at the kitchen table.

But, in the more formal sense, there have been three distinct attempts to carry on a 'NEWS'paper, each of them sponsored and manned by the one faction, - the Hibernators - as an organ and vehicle for the promulgation of a certain necessary exercise in mind-control - or let's hear it once again for Solidarity - ferreting the burrowing recalcitrant-recluse who needs only be reminded and recalled to his rightful accounting - er ... natural political alignment. The first of these mimeographed typewritten single sheet papers, printed on some colored legal-length foolscap, bore the colorful masthead, Schnieders and Stanfields, such as to convey some down-to-earthiness of the counterculture (alternative culture) contingent to which it owed its existence and whose sentiments it represented. After a time, this reference to to woolly body socks and a ubiquitous footwear to be found in widespread and indiscriminate use upon the Island, faded into the recesses as it lapsed into the divers imperatives of the moment, perhaps as its publisher took leave of the Island, or had run out funds, incentive or inspiration, or, possibly, was apprehended while trafficking, the Islanders not being privy to the actual cause of its demise.

The second of these sheets arose not immediately following the abatement of the first, but arise it did indeed from within the ranks of the selfsame counterculturists, feeling acutely the absence of the Fourth Estate in the tedium of Harmony Heaven, the new pseudoplume

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appearing on the masthead, The Common People. Not to outdo the first it seems, in terms of longevity, serving the needs of those selfsame individuals appearing thus upon the masthead, but only briefly as salve for the more durable essence of boredom; albeit theirs was not to be the clarion call for long.

And now we arrive at the proposition of Thrice Tried, not to appear upon the masthead, but none the less to represent renewed efforts, seeking the mystical significances of numbers as fuel toward perseverance; and thus we chance upon forthwith: The Mary Jane Times. 'Tis therein we browse the home-spun; and off-the-wall hallucinations harboring the secrets of herb treatments and cures, massage treatments and cures; acupressure treatments and cures, Jin Shin Do; lessons in Tai Chi, in mind boggling, sensitivity training; love-ins, peace-ins, and sundry moralizing inclusions; squibbing the blanks with advertisements for the local businesses, such as they might lay claim (Acme, no less) to be found within this wondrous place.

One should not present these flyers in their poorest light, for often they purport to cast a glow upon the things one might need to know; notice of meetings, concerning the ferry service, the possibility of Hydro, the application for a pub license, or the recommendations of planning entities with regard to future disposition of the Islands; not to overlook the regular call to PEACE by the peace faction, who always scribe condescendingly and mystically as one might speak to children, attempting to coerce them to come out of their hiding places. Occasionally, as would be wise with any organ that operates under the guise of Freedom of the Press, the publishers will invite and entertain responses and opposing views; and indeed one such writer did appear under the rather humorous By-Line 'Other Flatulences' attempting to dislodge those others of the more conventional cultural persuasion not to lie so contentedly oblivious, so comfortably ensconced in their circumscribed milieu, admonishing them to become involved, lest they cede the whole show to their opponents.

While, as a newspaper editor, it might be considered a noble endeavor to become the clarion in pursuing the objective of exercising ones 'right-to-know', it is seldom one provides only the facts, but more often than not one is provided with half-truths and biases intended to persuade one to think this or that. We were presented with one such instance as was the subject of discussion over the kitchen table. But more to the point, in an effort to persuade the populace to be for or against a public service, let's say, one might (WILL) exaggerate certain information in order to stir public sentiment or raise public anxiety (FEAR). By omitting certain details, by removing things from their contexts, one invades the equanimity of the community with certain agitations (falsehoods). One's 'right-to-know' and freedom of the press become caricatures of themselves as truth is perverted with the sole

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purpose to influence or persuade. Thus one is FORCED to abdicate his peaceful ensconcement to discover the truth all over - once again.

When it was learned the government was under considerable pressure to trim its budget, as it is given governments are always under such pressure, it became necessary to review the ferry services to various parts of the province, on a place by place basis. Certain government officials were assigned the task of investigating the need and efficacy in each instance, the Island not escaping such consideration. Objectivity was the goal used in the first instance by the government, in eliciting facts, achieved in the normal way of questioning those most apt to know, with some nominal Island representative (ear) in attendance. This representative decided to interpret the government's intent differently than it had in fact been presented to her, she thus reflecting and revealing her own anxieties or apprehensions, rather than relate the facts as they were, hence stirring an Island kafuffle wherein all were remaindered to the distinct impression that ferry service would be curtailed, all the while the Islanders had already had under discussion an issue, independently initiated, with regard to the increase of ferry service. In the end it was learned the source of the misinformation had come from another tabloid generally reporting the happenings on the waterways. One reacts too quickly to bury the Truth in its own name; we all too eagerly jump on the bandwagon.

The Mary Jane Times, in addition to printing the 'right-to-know' article of the impending government action involving the ferries, also commented editorially on the value of not increasing ferry service, largely an issue sponsored by the 'other' factions, its most memorable commentary involving AIDS, which speculated an increase in ferry service from 5 to 7 days would represent a 28% increased exposure to AIDS, not to mention as well, the additional disadvantage of more possible surprise visits from one's in-laws (the long arm of the restraining forces in this life).

Perhaps the facetiousness of the editorial commentary, unintentionally of course, since it is presumed the editor was convinced of his cuteness, cleverness and aproponess of his insights, in the end, did create the proper perspective regarding the media in general, as something one can take or leave, as something one MUST take or leave so as to protect himself against the invasion of his privacy. Driven asunder then, we elect to choose ignorance of the biased affairs of men do we? Or must we too endure this as must we endure all the other manifestations of homo sap?

In order to preserve the institution of the press, more specifically the right of free speech, the free speech that would demand truth as the only option, he might start up his own Foolscap Digest, conjuring platitudes and home-spun remedies for the problems of man-on-this-

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earth. Tongue-in-Cheek-Foolscap', or 'Droppings in the Road' subtitled 'Watch Your Step'; Anybody?

Ought one view any of these endeavors with any degree of measured seriousness?

Yes!, why is it man insists upon carrying this awful baggage with him wherever he goes?

No discernment - that is, the Island, an Island, is the place to which one transports his baggage, that which has found little purpose or currency elsewhere, that extension of oneself that has been found wanting, or has found little acceptance, that extension to which we insistently cling - to the Island we bring. Not with any expectation, but to summarily remove it from a cruel world, an indifferent world (how be cruel and indifferent simultaneously?). The discernment might involve leaving something behind. What has one learned? - that he might not do in his new circumstance?

One imagines some freeing, some expansion of self.

Is there a difference to be noted between extension and expansion. Imagine one as physical, the other as spiritual; both call for space. The uncoiling of oneself; the unfolding, of a crumpled, wrinkled mass, the revelation of incoherence and irrelevance? A call for discovery? A requirement of discovery, a mandate, an imperative.

Not to just sit down and hallucinate, to imbibe, ingest, inhale, inject? To whileaway; to dullaware in solitaire? To want to know and fully understand why they did away with the steam engine and the caboose, why we must all become some dumb anachronism, why we are annihilating memories. Because they are useless, Dumby!.

Yes!, quite often catastrophic, because, even on the Island, within an isolation, that 'radical solitude', the knowing becomes intensified. What one sought to escape - the outside - was indeed a complexity, the complexity of a life of which one imagined he was the center, but unable to effect. While conversely (or perversely if you will) one was easily seduced into the outside by the force of one's look-a-likes - in conformity - without comprehending any of it, or its necessity, or reason to be, while one might instinctively withdraw, but didn't, because he wanted to belong, almost desperately, but didn't, because there was nothing near, into which he could withdraw, because when he withdrew to a place, someone came along and took it away like they did with the steam engine and the caboose. One was betrayed in his conforming; sold a bill of goods, a pig in a poke. In his absence, they went about destroying all the solitudes, the memories of good times with oneself; they claimed it was only reverie and nostalgia.

The force of the question became intensified. No longer do ones' look-a-likes provide either substance or answers; thus to thine own self do we fall heir. A dose of reality in isolation. A love affair with oneself?

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Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or take up arms against a sea of troubles, And by opposing end them?

An easy way to survive? What is, that is?
Grow and traffic.
Fortify oneself in and on obscurity.
Deviate, Deceive, Deny; Throw up a smoke screen.

The compulsion to survive, the requirement for survival; a host to carry on all the bad memories; the mandate; the imperative - for survival - makes of thee, alas, what doth it make of thee? Whether an honest business man charging his customer whatever the market will bear (or whatever we are stupid enough to pay) or an honest banker usuriously preying on 'our needs' (Who was it said there are no more predators?) - or an honest 'peace' negotiator not negotiating peace, only the limits of war and destruction. Draculas, all.

Since these carriers of the Good Word, appearing irregularly and spuriously, often controversy driven epistles, others have interjected themselves, one not unlike the Watch Tower, another bearing the Sour Apple Press on its Masthead, all contents thus imagined. Then the more innocuous banner, Harmony Heaven Review which stirred not a little controversy, its promoter and editor rankling and railing against all bureaucratic interventions into one's existence, often amusingly; and mocking all the airy fairy propositions brought forth by the counterculturists, often amusingly. It died its own death, though of far greater literary merit than any of the others.

Finally to end in a non-controversial monthly, mastheaded the Times; a summary of all the harmonious doings of the blessed place; the editor of the defunct Harmony Heaven Review scowling a threat to resurrect the real drama of blessedness.