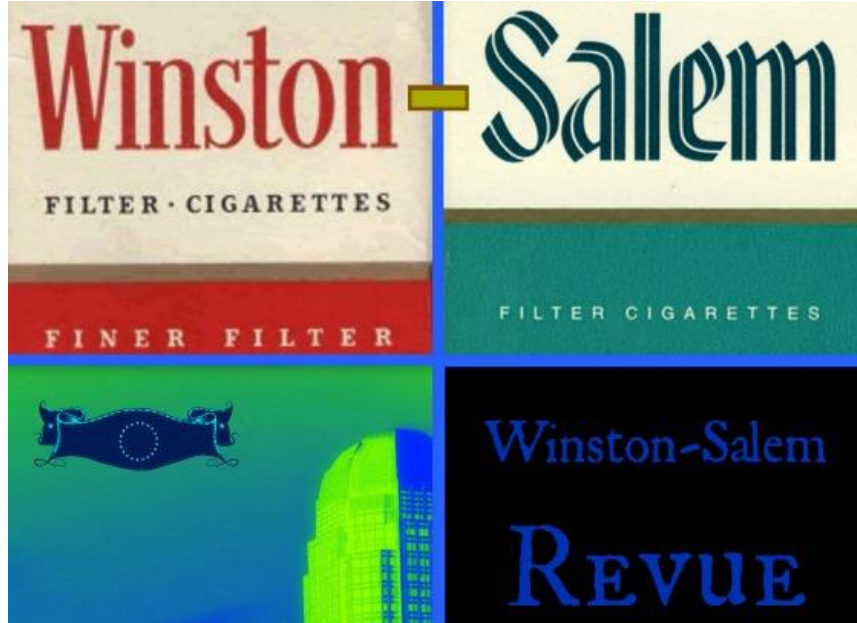


**another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory**



**Winston-Salem Revue** by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | APRIL 2017

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by Mike Bozart

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Act I: The drive.

The weather on this April Fools' Day morning was in three words: perfect for driving (sunny and mild). The 85-minute drive – primarily up Interstate 85 – to Winston-Salem (NC, USA) from Charlotte was acceptably uneventful. Monique (Agent 32) and I (Agent 33) disembarked after watching the Liverpool-Everton match (LIV 3-1 EVE) at Valhalla Pub in 3<sup>rd</sup> Ward. I would chant 'Olé, olé' and Monique would follow with 'Coutinho-o-o, Coutinho-o-o'. Yes, we had forgotten to bring our CDs, so we had to improvise until a radio station picked up its game. As we neared the intersecting metal arches on US 52, a short conversation arose.

"Look, mahal, [love in Tagalog] we're going through a giant gyroscope," I said to Monique. *Huh?*

"But, where is the pull string, Agent 33?" *I just know that he has switched on his audio recorder.*

"Maybe it's not yet finished, Agent 32." [Actually, it – a piece of modern sculpture – was installed in November of 2016.]

"So, that's why it's not spinning." *She's already on her game.*

"Score! I'll make sure to include that opening goal when I write this trek up later." *I just knew that he was recording.*

Eight minutes later, we began to scale High Street from Brookstown Avenue (from the Tar Branch valley) in our gray 2005 Kia Rio hatchback. At the STOP sign, I rolled down my window and peered over my left shoulder. *I guess traffic from that freeway exit ramp has the right of way. Yep, that car just cruised right through. Hmmm ... Can't see if anyone is coming that well. Bad sight lines. Ah, just ease out slowly.*

It was not an unlucky motor-vehicle day. We safely made it up the semi-steep hill to The Hawthorne Inn & Conference Center. *Whew! Note to self: Don't enter this hotel parking lot from lower High Street.*

Act II: The hotel.

The Hawthorne, an older complex, had been refurbished. Our room, 601, an end unit, was behind the conference center. There was a medium-size, water-filled but not yet open, swollen-hourglass-shaped swimming pool in between the two buildings.

Our room had a balcony. In fact, all of the hotel rooms had separate balconies. However, none were accessible. Or, I should more accurately state, access was strongly discouraged. “What do you mean, Agent 33?” I heard one of you ask in the UK. Or, was it from the USA? Anyway, all of the balcony doors (the sliding-glass type, I presumed) had been replaced with aluminum-framed glass panels (similar to the storefronts of those ubiquitous American strip malls).

Now, stay with me for one strange feature: the screen-less upper-left window panel – drumroll or spring roll? – could be widely opened! Yes, you could step over – well, with the aid of an adjacent dining chair if under 6’-7” (2 meters) tall – the meter-high (39.37 inches) first panel and alight on the black-mesh-cloth-covered concrete balcony, which brings up some other interesting items of concern.

For one, the balcony itself would probably not pass current building code. Oh, it still looked structurally sound. And, I’m sure that the reinforced-concrete slab could still safely support a party of four. Well, as long as they didn’t start hopping about like overgrown cheering rabbits, which we certainly didn’t do. (We didn’t even go out on it.)

I opened the large vertical-hinged window to let in some 68° Fahrenheit (20° Celsius) air. *We picked a perfect day.*

The welded, semi-ornate, wrought-iron railing system caught my eye. “Monique, look at this railing. If you were a safety inspector, what would jump out at you?” *Jump out at me? Is there a mumu? [Tagalog for phantom]*

“You wouldn’t make it to the pool if you jumped from here. Splat! Extra-large spatula needed in the courtyard.” She then enjoyed a cha-cha-esque chortle.

“You’re thinking overboard; look below-board, Agent 32.”

“Woah! I see that gaping gap hazard. A baby could easily roll under the railing, Agent 33.”

There were about 11 inches (28 cm) of vertical clearance between the slab and the lowest horizontal rail segment.

“Good safety eye, Monique. You must be reading those hot tomes, *IBC [International Building Code] 2015* and *OSHA [Occupational Safety and Health Administration] 1910* nine

hours a day.” *Yeah, right! Was OSHA created in 1910? [OSHA was established in 1970 by the OSH Act.]*

“Make it ten, Parkaar.” [my ailing alias] Monique then smiled.

I chuckled for a couple of seconds. “Anywho [sic] or whom, that’s probably why their legal and safety departments got rid of the balcony doors. I bet a small toddler crawled under and off.” *Yikes! How terrible!*

“Also, 33, look how close we are to the next room’s balcony. [about 4 feet, 1.22 meters, to the right] You know that drunks would attempt that. I bet one of them doofled, [sic] [defn: doofle, (v.i.) to awkwardly or unexpectedly fail when performing or attempting to perform a physical task or body movement] to use your term, and made an unforeseen earthly exit.” *Maybe so.*

“Yeah, I could see it happening, Monique.”

“And, what’s with this black fabric over the balcony’s concrete deck, Agent 33? Is it supposed to deter people from stepping on it? Is it sticky like flypaper?” *Huh?*

“Oh, I think it’s for aesthetic reasons, my lovely pinay, [a Philippine woman] enchanting Agent 32. Maybe it was cheaper than exterior concrete paint. And, maybe it lasts longer. Paint tends to get flaky on concrete.” *How does he know this? / Wonder if any acrylic paint is left on that raised sewage-line cone off Executive Center Drive? [in east Charlotte] When did I paint that mumu on it? 1983, I think. It’s probably all gone now. Sure wasn’t much left in 2003.*

“Ok, enough of balcony safety. Did you bring any condoms, Pumperazzi? [sic] No glove, no love.” *Where in the world did she hear that phrase?*

“On course, 32.”

“I thought that the saying was ‘of course’, 33.”

“Of and on, and on and off.” *Why did I have to ask?*

“Ok, put your sausage wrapper on and prepare for organasm.” [sic] *Organasm, what a hilarious coinage.*

Act III: The stroll.

With the delightful weather and the close proximity to downtown, we opted to go it on foot. We walked down to the

southernmost point of the hotel parking lot. We turned left and crossed Marshall Street SW, passing a conglomeration of three restaurants (Twin City Hive Coffee Lounge, Di Lisio's Italian Restaurant and Señor Bravo Mexican Restaurant).

"Want a cappuccino, Monique?"

"I'm fine for now. I'm more hungry than thirsty."

"Ok, I know a safe bet that isn't too far from here."

"Lead the way, Parkaarwalkski." [sic] *She's on a roll.*

We walked hand-in-hand across South Cherry Street. And then we turned left onto The Strollway, a pedestrian and bicycle passage which slipped under the west-side overhang of a five-story building before emerging in the parking lot as a paved, tree-lined, generously wide, urban greenway trail. Whereas most greenways follow creeks or rivers, this one seemed to connect contiguous parking lots. We had never experienced anything like it. *This is really unique. Linking downtown surface lots: an ingenious idea.*

Soon we were passing under the Business Interstate 40 / US 421 freeway. We crossed West 1<sup>st</sup> Street and saw the city's tallest building, the 34-story, 460-foot (140-meter), round-topped Wells Fargo tower (100 North Main Street) across a vacant plaza. *I think that was formerly the Wachovia tower. [It was.]*

We soon came upon the emerald-green-windowed, quite modern, angular, 21-story BB&T Financial Center tower on our immediate right at 2<sup>nd</sup> Street NW. This is where The Strollway officially ended. *This must be the northern terminus. Will have to bring our bikes next time. I really miss that old Plymouth minivan. It sure made bicycle transport a breeze.*

We walked directly across the street, continuing up the western sidewalk of Town Run Lane NW. When we arrived at West 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, we looked right and saw the older Winston Tower a few blocks away. Its name was spelled out in tall, dark, Times-font letters atop the 29-floor, completed in 1966, rectangular tower. *Funny, I didn't see that building from our hotel balcony. [It was completely blocked by the BB&T Financial Center.]*

“Is there a Salem Tower, too, Agent 33?” Monique asked.

“I don’t think so, Agent 32,” I replied as a multiracial pack of middle-aged joggers overtook us. *Wonder if any of them heard the agent-number nonsense. / That red-haired guy just called that Asian lady ‘Agent 32’. Who in the world are those people? Too many weirdies [sic] here now.*

“Did you know that this city actually started from the combination of two neighboring small towns, Agent 33?” *Monique must have pulled up Wikipedia on her smartphone.*

“Uh, yes, I actually did, Agent 32. And, get this, Winston and Salem are both RJR [R. J. Reynolds] cigarette brands, mahal. Imagine if they had built a matching pair of buildings to the exact proportions of a cigarette pack, and painted or decaled them accordingly. A 350-foot-tall (107 meters), 90-foot-deep (27.4 meters), 220-foot-wide (67 meters) Winston pack o’ cigs building next to a same-size Salem pack o’ cigs building. Then, exactly halfway-up, an over-alley connector could be the requisite dash.” *Or, would it be a hyphen?*

“Yeah, that would have been interesting, Parkaar – a real tourist attraction, no less. But, how would the reverse side of those cigarette-pack buildings be imaged?” *So keen she is.*

“Oh, you’re right, mahal. There’s a dilemma there. Would they switch the package fronts? Or, would they just leave them blank? *Or, paint/label the respective package backs on the buildings?*

“Well, it’s academic now, 33. I really doubt that they would be built today. You know how cigarette smoking is now frowned upon.” *Yeah, she’s right.*

“No doubt, 32. Such would have had to have been built prior to the early 1970s – before the prevailing cigarette-smoking sentiment changed in this country.”

On the other side of West 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, the public way’s name changed to Park Vista Lane. We walked up to West 4<sup>th</sup> Street and turned left. In just two blocks we had arrived: the Mellow Mushroom of Winston-Salem. *Our readers are going to think that we are working for this gourmet pizza outfit. But, I just know that Monique is craving another Thai-dye pizza. I wouldn’t mind a couple of slices myself.*

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