

another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory



RÍRÁ RUCKUS by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | MAY 2016

It was a cool, cloudy, windy Cinco de Mayo (May 5th) that found me scurrying to get to RÍRÁ, an Irish bar in uptown Charlotte (NC, USA), by 3:05 PM, the start time of the Liverpool – Villarreal Europa League semifinal match. I took the Gold Line streetcar from CPCC (Central Piedmont Community College) to the final stop, across from Time Warner Cable Arena (now Spectrum Center). From there I quickly hobbled (lower back still not fully recovered from a herniated disc; sciatica still nagging) across the brick plaza to 5th Street and then crossed the light-rail tracks, eighty feet (24.4 meters) in front of a slow-moving two-car train.

Soon I was fast-limping it across College Street and up to North Tryon Street. A right turn and few more hitches in gait, and I was at the black double doors of RÍRÁ. I pulled the right door open and walked inside and heard the game. I looked at my phone before going upstairs. It was 3:14. *I hope I haven't missed anything. Oh, it's probably still nil-nil.*

There were two dozen or so LFC (Liverpool Football Club) fans in mostly red jerseys on the upper floor, already quite giddy. When I saw the score on the large projection screen, I knew why. It was 1-0 for Liverpool. *Wow, they're already ahead! Darn, I missed the first goal. Should have left ten minutes earlier. The story of my life.*

"Who scored?" I asked the core of the group.

"An own goal," a bearded, 40-ish, Caucasian guy answered.

"Villarreal were under severe pressure," a familiar, thirty-something, Indian American dude added.

“We came out like a blitzkrieg,” a twenty-something, husky, African American fellow said.

I just nodded, smiled, walked over to the front end of the bar, and ordered a Guinness Nitro IPA. I remained standing next to the Exit door, as it felt better than sitting. I settled my mind on the game. *Wow, Anfield sure is loud and lively once again. Klopp has got them fired up.*

The first half ended with no more scoring. There was an omnipresent lull as the LFC fans dispersed for cigarette breaks and private phone calls.

I ordered another beer, which arrived as the second half kicked off. In the 63rd minute, Sturridge got a nice pass from Firmino and scored a second goal for Liverpool with a well-placed low shot. Thunderous applause erupted. Stomping, chanting and singing soon took over the second floor. *Two-nil is a nice lead, but it's not a safe lead. If Villarreal score, they would advance based on away goals. We really need one more to be out of the woods.*

“Let’s get an insurance goal!” I yelled.

“Hell yeah!” someone retorted.

Then in the 81st minute, Sturridge squibbed an attempt that bounced right in the box for Lallana to niftily shoe in. This time the reaction was even louder than last time. Everyone knew that we were safe now. *Villarreal now have to score two goals in the remaining eleven or twelve minutes. That aint gonna happen. We’ve got this. We’re moving on to Switzerland.*

“Basel, here we come!” a fan in the back yelled.

The match ended 3-nil. A much-needed, well-deserved clean sheet for Mignolet.

We all then sang the LFC anthem, *You'll Never Walk Alone*, as patrons of a private Cinco de Mayo party began to trickle upstairs, somewhat startled by what was going on. *These soccer fans are bonkers!*

Soon the projector screen was retracted. It was 5:00 and our time on the second floor was over. Many of the LFC fans then left the pub, but some went downstairs for the public Cinco de Mayo party, including me. *Well, I don't have to pick up Monique (my wife, aka Agent 32) until 9:30. Really don't want to drive back to the eastside. Might as well chill out down here for a while. Maybe record a conversation.*

I surveyed the lower level. It was almost completely full now. *Wow, this place really filled up over the past two hours. I hope that I can find a chair. Tired of standing. I think that I can now manage sitting down for a while. I'll just sit on my right hip. Yeah, just don't put any weight on the left side.*

I spied an open bar stool and made my way towards it. There was a white guy in his mid-50s with grayish white hair, wearing black-rimmed glasses, seated next to my targeted azz- [sic] parking spot.

“Anyone sitting here?” I politely asked.

“No, take it; it's all yours,” the man, who kind of looked like the actor-comic Steve Martin, cheerfully said.

“Oh, thanks,” I said as I strategically positioned my pelvis on the cushion. *This aint so bad. I think I can do this.*

“You got a good seat,” he then said. “If you drink too much, you can just lean against that divider wall.” [on my immediate left]

“Yeah, you’re right,” I concurred. *This guy seems intelligent and just may be recordable-worthy. Let’s switch on the mic[rophone]. There we go. It’s on. I hope he’s interesting.*

“So, what brings you here this evening?” the smiling man to my right asked. “Cinco de Mayo?” *He really could double as Steve Martin.*

“Uh, no. I came for the Liverpool – Villarreal match upstairs.”

“I heard you guys after the goals. What a freaking ruckus! You guys scored twice, right?”

“No, we scored three times. I was a little late and missed the first goal, which was an own goal as they call it. A Villarreal player accidentally knocked it into his own net.”

“I see. I got here at about a quarter to four. I must have missed that one, too.”

“This tavern is the official Liverpool and Arsenal bar for Charlotte,” I informed him. “We share it. It’s big enough for both of us. If our games are on at the same time, they divide us up by floors. We get along pretty well with each other. We used to share a bar with [Manchester] United and Chelsea fans. It didn’t work out so well.” I began to chuckle.

“Get tossed out?”

“Yeah, you know, Liverpool fans are always getting thrown out of somewhere. We’re just no damn good.” I started to chuckle again.

“Ah, I know you soccer – whoops, I mean football – fans are very passionate about your teams.”

“It really is on another level for whatever reason. They have to segregate the fans over there in England. Typically, a visiting team’s fans may only be offered a block of a few thousand seats in a designated section of the away stadium. And, they will be guarded by police, who will stand in the aisles around them for the whole game. Away fans are not allowed to buy tickets anywhere they want like in the NFL. If you are caught cheering in the wrong area, you get removed, regardless of the seat listed on your ticket. One kewl [*sic*] thing that comes out of this is the ability to sing and chant in unison at high volume. There’s nothing like this at NFL games. Don’t get me wrong; I like the NFL and our home team, the Panthers, but there’s really no comparison.”

“I agree. There is definitely a higher level of passion and organized merriment. And, the isolation of away fans may be a good idea for the NFL to adopt, especially in Philadelphia.” He grinned.

Then we both chuckled for a few seconds. *He must have experienced a game there.*

“Yeah, I would rate Philly as the most hostile environment for an away-team fan. Oh, by the way, what’s your name? I’m Mike.” *No need to go with the Parkaar alias here.*

“I’m Ted. Nice to meet you, Mike. So, what do you do besides root for Liverpool FC in Irish bars?”

“I have a safety gig at a local college and do a little writing. Well, actually a lot as of late. I wrote a novel a few years ago: *Gold, a summer story*. It hasn’t exactly made the New York Times bestseller list.” I let out a short nervous laugh. “I also wrote a couple of novellas and I write short stories based on real-life events. What about you, Ted?” *I wonder if he will write about this encounter. I bet he will. He seems the type. Wonder if I am being recorded.*

“Would you believe that I sell prosthetic limbs? In fact, I have a sales pitch to make in about an hour and a half to some orthopedic surgeons.” *At 7:00 PM?*

“I see. Well, I guess you are always well-armed.” *How corny.*

He laughed. “Yeah, you could say that.”

“Where are you from, Ted?” *Does this guy know my ex?*

“Well, I lived in San Diego for 32 years.”

“Ah, the city consistently voted to have the best weather. Go lightning bolts! A Chargers fan, right?”

“No, just a fan of a well-played NFL game. I honestly don’t root for any single team. Never have.” *How odd.*

“C’mon, Ted; you are kidding me.” *An NFL fan with no favorite team? How weird!*

“No, I’m serious. I’m just not into all the tribalism and slandering of American cities. Oh, by the way, I just recently moved back to Frederick.”

“Where is Frederick?” *Pennsylvania? Delaware?*

“It’s in Maryland, some forty-five miles [72.4 km] northwest of Washington, DC.”

“I see. Is there a Metro station there?”

“No, the nearest Metro station is Shady Grove, about 29 miles [46.7 km] from Frederick. There’s been talk of extending the Red Line all the way to Frederick, but it got voted down. The town doesn’t want it.”

“Why not?” I asked. “I thought all of the train-less towns in the DC metro area were clamoring for, and craving to be on, one of the to-be-extended lines.”

“Well, Frederick is already served by a MARC [Maryland Area Regional Commuter] train line. The town knows that once a Metro station goes in, everything will get more expensive, much more expensive, especially real estate.” *But, a higher tax base?*

“I hear ya. I have a friend in south Charlotte who grew up in Falls Church, Virginia, who said that after the two Metro stations went in, real-estate values doubled overnight. Which is great, I guess, if you already own and are looking to sell.”

“But, not so good if you are looking to buy or rent something decent,” he said with a wry smile.

“It’s like a double-edged sword, isn’t it, Ted?”

“It really is, Mike. Listen, I love the Metro, and still use it when I have appointments in Washington. I’m fine with driving to Derwood and getting on the train at Shady Grove. But, if/when it gets extended to Frederick, well, that’s when Frederick will be a part of DC for all intents and purposes, and no longer in the sleepy, reasonably priced Maryland foothills.”

“I hear ya, Ted. Hey, got any artificial spines in your bag of medical tricks?”

“Are you over 50?”

“Yeah, I’m 51.”

“Sorry, can’t help ya.” Ted then had a laugh.

“Growing old is so wonderful, isn’t it?”

“It’s a many splinted and splintered thing, Mike.”

I chuckled. “How long are you in town, Ted?”

Ted swilled down the rest of his golden-yellow pilsner beer. “Just tonight, Mike. Just tonight. Tomorrow I take my ossified song and dance to Jacksonville, Florida. Say, where can I find your writing online? It would be nice to have something to read on the airplane other than *SkyMall*.”

“Free-ebooks.net and smashwords.com. Just put *Mike Bozart* in as the author.”

“With a z instead of a g?” *Not Bogart?*

“You got it. It’s a Flemish corruption.” *A Flemish corruption?*

“Hey, there’s your next novel’s title!”

“Maybe so, Ted. Anyway, that should cue up a queue of free downloads.”

“Cue up a queue. Use that line in your next short story.”

“Ok, Ted, I will. And thanks for your interest. Feel free to rate the stories honestly.”

“Honestly?”

“Ok, lie and give them 4.5 stars.” *4.5?*

We both had a mighty guffaw.

“Well, my time’s up here, Mike.”

“Break a leg tonight, Ted!”

March 2017 update: We (Charlotte LFC Reds) got tossed out of RíRá two months later (now Arsenal fans have it to themselves).

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Zap by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | November 2017

At 2:49 PM on a sweltering, steam-pot-hot, mid-August (the 15th) Tuesday in 2017 in uptown Charlotte (NC, USA), I opened the massive portcullis-esque wooden door and entered RÍRÁ, an Irish pub on North Tryon Street. The air conditioning felt great. I glanced up at the nearest flat-screen TV. The score was still nil-nil (Hoffenheim – Liverpool) in the 5th minute. *Good deal – haven't missed a goal.*

I made my way over to the bar and alighted on a stool three-fourths of the way down. Soon I was looking once again at the statue of St. Patrick. *Ah, he's still scaring the snakes away from the beer taps.*

Then in the 10th minute, Hoffenheim were awarded a spot kick, due to Lovren tripping Gnabry in the penalty area.

“Come on, Dejan!” I yelled to a nearly vacant back section of the tavern.

However, my outburst found the 30-ish Irish bartender's ears. Joey, a West Ham United fan, began chatting with me.

“A tough call for you guys,” he stated.

“Lovren can't be that reckless in the 18-yard box,” I retorted. “So foolish, and probably so costly.”

“Think Mignolet can save it?” he asked.

“Wouldn't bet on it,” I groaned. *Maybe if I think negatively ...*

But, Simon did. It was a poor penalty kick by Kramarić. Mignolet didn't have to move his feet. *It worked!*

“Zap!” Joey shouted. *Zap?*

“We got real lucky there,” I insisted. “Got away with one.”

“Your team killed off a bigtime Hoffenheim scoring chance,” he commented. “A major confidence boost for you guys. I bet that Liverpool now scores a goal.”

“That would be nice,” I replied.

Then, about 25 minutes later (the 35th minute of the match), an 18-years-young Trent Alexander-Arnold curled a 28.5-yard (26 meters) free kick into the lower-right corner of the goal. One-nil for the Reds. *Sweet!*

“Hope they can hold onto the lead,” I wished. “They have a knack for allowing goals right after scoring.”

“Hey, that was very Coutinho-like,” Joey contended. “You guys may be fine without him.” [Barcelona would be rebuffed in the 2017 summer transfer window.]

“Joey, let’s not talk about our pouting, petite Prince Philippe right now. It’s become a sore subject – kind of like an open, pus-oozing, festering wound. How about your Hammers match against [Manchester] United?” [their Premier League season opener]

“Four-nil. It was awful. They killed us. Totally outclassed us. No two ways about it.” Joey sighed. “Not sure how this season will turn out for us. I’m not very optimistic.”

There was a late scare, but the first half ended with Liverpool up 1-0. *So far, so good.*

Then a stocky, dark-haired, middle-aged Latin American man walked up to the bar.

“A Liverpool fan, yes?” he asked me, suspecting the answer.

“Even after all the heart attacks,” I answered and tittered.

“Mignolet is a good goalkeeper,” he then proclaimed. “People are too hard on him. That penalty-kick save was major. Oh, my name is Tyler Durden.” *That sounds familiar.*

“Pleased to meet you, Tyler. My name is Mike.” *No need to use a ‘psecret psociety’ alias in this setting.*

“Have you been here before?” he enquired.

“Ah, yes – many times. This was the official LFC [Liverpool Football Club] bar for Charlotte, but we got tossed; red-carded in June of 2016. We’re now housed at Valhalla Pub on South Church Street, right at the corner of the Latta Arcade alleyway. I didn’t have enough time to make it over there today.”

“Oh, yes; I know the place.” Tyler seemed interested.

“We’ll be there until someone plays Frisbee® again with a porcelain plate. Oh, by the way, I wrote a short story about a time in this bar last year. [*RÍRÁ Ruckus*] The setting was almost exactly where we are right now. The protagonist was a prosthetic limb salesman from San Diego.”

“Was he on his last leg?” Tyler deftly linked.

“That’s funny as hell, man!” I exclaimed. “Score! Superb delivery. I’ll have to use that one somewhere someday.”

“So, you’re a writer?” Tyler then solemnly asked.

“Not professionally – at least not yet,” I replied. “I pay the bills with my safety gig.” *Safety gig?*

“A safety gig, huh. Would that be with three or four prongs?”
Or five?!

“Another goal! Wow! You’re not missing any today, Tyler.”

“Thanks. You left that one right out over the plate, Mike.”

“I tend to do that a lot. My brother and I played Little League Baseball. Rest assured that I was not the pitcher.”

We both had a chuckle.

“Tell me more about your job in safety,” he then requested.

“Well, it’s not exactly the sexiest or most lucrative field. Inspections. Reports. Code enforcement. Advisement. I’m like an internal referee. And, who likes a referee? Anyway, what line of work are you in, Tyler?” *I bet that he’s in sales.*

“IT [information technology] at a big bank.”

“Ah, an office with a view.”

“Not for me.”

“Say, are you up for a round of eight questions?” I asked.
Wonder what he’ll ask.

“Sure, fire away, Mike,” Tyler broadcasted excitedly. *Record light: on. Commence interview.*

“Question one: When did you start working for this big bank?”

“March 13th of this year, after getting laid-off from another big bank.”

“Damn. That sucks.”

“It’s ok, Mike. That’s how they all operate. Slice and dice every quarter.”

“Question two: How is the culture there?”

“They work like they don’t have families,” Tyler emphatically revealed. “Or, at least that’s what they want their supervisors to think. They work their asses off. Some people send e-mails from their cars, or late at night, just to give the impression that they work really early or really late.” *Interesting.*

“Question three: How is the management?”

“My boss is buying a software product that sucks for the lab, and my job is to sell it as a *great* product to his boss and to Network Engineering. I hate to be such a Debbie Downer, but I think the guy wants to get promoted and leave our team eating a pile of shit.” *Such candor!*

“Wow! Question four: Any strange occurrences at work?”

“There is this Indian guy that is an asshole to everyone on the team,” Tyler divulged. “He was an asshole to me when I started. I was the new guy and didn’t know the routine. I said to him ‘Hey ...’ And, his curt reply was ‘My name is not *Hey*.’ Little did he know that I have PTSD [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder] from combat in Iraq, and that I’m a Senior Drill Sergeant in the [United States Army] Reserve. I screamed at this little piece of shit, basic-training style, just two short inches [5 cm] from his shocked face for about a minute – just

like I learned in the Airborne Infantry: the arrive violently method. Because this happened in the lab, the only people that heard it were other IT-ers in or near the lab. I told the boss what happened and he just told me not to do it again. That Indian fucker doesn't talk to me now. Problem solved.”
Woah!

“Ok, moving right along to question five: What is your biggest job complaint? Or, did you just tell me?” I had a short chortle.

“Having to get up and go to this job and lock myself inside a cube in a windowless lab. Humans were born to work in sunlight. I need the sun.” *Not an overcaster. [sic]*

“Question six: What is the best part of your job?”

“Working half a block from RíRá. They'll make my lunch off the menu. I get a simple ham and cheese sandwich, whatever soup is in the tureen that day, and as much Guinness I can fit in my belly. Sometimes I go at three-ish, sometimes at happy hour, and sometimes after work. Really, every hour is happy hour.” *Living la vida loca. [‘the crazy life’ in Spanish]*

“Question seven: The best overheard conversation at work was?” *Is this red-haired guy kidding?*

“None. There were more conversations in Gorge Orwell's *1984* factories than in this morgue where I work. If someone chokes on a peanut in their cube and drops dead, no one will notice – no one.”

“Ok, we're mercifully down to the last one – question eight: Who's the most unusual employee? Don't use their real name; use an alias. I don't want to be sued.”

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