

another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory



Starring in Roanoke by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | October 2017

Starring in Roanoke

By Mike Bozart

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On a much warmer than normal, sun-drenched, cobalt-blue sky with wispy cirrus clouds, mid-October, late Saturday afternoon, Monique (Agent 32) and I (Agent 33) found ourselves atop Mill Mountain (Roanoke, VA, USA) at the main overlook. The imposing, though not yet illuminated, 88.5-foot-tall (27-meter-high), steel-frame-supported, neon-tubed, five-pointed star was behind us, and the city that was first known as Big Lick was 1,045 feet (319 meters) below. A gathering of some two dozen tourists, many from overseas, were taking photos and videos. Four foreign languages were overheard. My woozy, somewhat-hungover-from-last-night-at-the-Mellow-Mushroom (on Franklin Road SW) brain thought: *This certainly is a must-see. Wonder how many knuckleheads have climbed onto that star. No wonder they've installed video cameras.*

“An impressive view, isn't it, Agent 32?” I asked my forever-fascinating Filipina wife. *Agent 32? I sense a short story in the offing. I bet that he's already recording.*

“It's wonderful!” she exclaimed. “I'm so glad that we came up here, Agent 33.” *She knows that this segment of today will get written up later.*

Monique then started taking her own pics and vids from different angles and elevations. *She really likes this place.*

Then there was an impromptu question from a North African fellow: “Sir, could you take our picture?”

“Yeah, sure,” I replied. *I wonder if they're from Morocco.*

The young man then handed me his Samsung smartphone. His presumed fiancée pointed at the dot that controlled the virtual shutter. Then the quite charming, mid-20-ish, shiny-black-haired, very-much-in-new-love couple posed in front of the mammoth metal star that was erected in 1949. *Quite a photogenic duo, they are. / I bet that they were all over each other last night.*

I snapped two pics on his sleek, slender, silver-edged phone. “Ok, a pair of photos of the pair of lovers starring in Roanoke,” I announced. *Starring in Roanoke? / Huh? / Hubby is already saying ridiculous things; he’s already pontificating for the mic. / Hope they liked my remark.*

“Thanks so much,” the content, well-groomed, spruce suitor replied with a slight nod.

“Have you checked out the [Roanoke] Pinball Museum yet?” Monique asked the all-smiles duo.

“No, we haven’t,” the cute, dimpled, young lady answered.

“Oh, you really should,” my wife insisted. “It’s really cool, and it wasn’t crowded at all.”

“It’s on the second floor of the Center in the Square Building in downtown,” I indicated. “There are lots of vintage machines that you can play for as long as you like – until your index fingers cramp up or fall off. We just spent three hours in there.” *A pinball museum? In this town?*

“How much is it?” the curious, athletic, white-tank-topped man asked. *Wonder if they’ll think that the price is too high. If you’re not into pinball, it probably is.*

“I think that it was around twelve dollars apiece, but it’s for the whole day. You can come and go as you please. We will be going back this evening after an early dinner.” *This red-haired guy must be addicted to the silver ball.*

“Ok, we may do that tomorrow,” he said. “Thanks for the sightseeing tip.”

“No problem,” I replied. “I hadn’t played pinball in two decades. And, trust me; it showed, early and often.” I chuckled. “A lot of bad flipper play. Strikeouts and side-outs aplenty. I’ve lost my touch.” *Failed flipperazzi [sic]*

He let out a slight laugh as she grabbed his hand. They then walked over to a paved trail that led down to a small zoo. *Wonder where they are in a decade. Might they be back here? On this very date? Still married? With a child? Or two? Or, never to return to America? Or, happily settled in America? Might a terrible accident be in their future? Hope not. Or, might a propitious windfall be headed their way, landing right in their joint bank account. Will they live to be what they would call ‘old’? Ah, the mysteries of this life.*

“You look like you are lost in your thoughts, Agent 33. What are you thinking about, Parkaar?” [my ailing alias] my inquisitive wife asked. *Lost in lost thoughts.*

“Oh, just thinking about how you encounter random people – like that young couple – at random places, and how you never see or hear from them again, but you wonder what will become of them, but you know that’s none of your business, and so you just stand back and wonder as the west wind blows another weekend away. Yeah, those kinds of thoughts

again, mahal.” [love in Tagalog] *Oh, brother. Did he secretly ingest some of those damn magic crystals again? But, where? He hasn't been out of my sight today. Did he stir them into his coffee in the bathroom at that Starbucks? [on Old Whitmore Avenue in Roanoke] That would be just like my sneaky kano. [Filipino slang for American] But, this pinay [Filipina] is onto his mind games. He is not as sly as he thinks he is.*

Monique cleared her throat. “I just had to ask,” she retorted with a shade of exasperation. “Congranulations, [sic] Agent 33.” *Congranulations? Maybe she thinks that I consumed some of those ‘granules de grandeur’. Sure would be nice. Think I ran out of stock over two years ago.*

Then a short, rotund, late-50-ish, white guy in a navy-blue T-shirt walked up to us. “Sturdy construction,” he proclaimed. “This overlook isn’t sliding off this mountain anytime soon. No sir-ree. This one was planted real good.” *Planted? Maybe he’s a deck builder. Maybe that’s common argot in the trade. He kind of looks like an outdoor contractor. Such a lousy stereotypical thought. Scratch that. / Did this guy build this?*

“Yeah, it looks pretty solid,” I affirmed. *Now, what does this guy know about decks? I bet that he doesn’t even know what Trex® is.*

“I knew the guys who put the north arrow on this deck,” he then stated as he glanced down. (There was a four-cardinal-directions-of-the-compass-rose inlay in the earth-tone composite planking.) *He ‘knew’ them? Does he not know them now? Are they all dead? Maybe he’s a tall-tale teller.*

“Nice design and excellent execution,” I opined. “Looks like they got the angles right.” *Of course they did.*

“You know that the magnetic north pole is moving, right?” Monique quizzed him.

“Oh, I’m sure that they got the declination right,” the now-getting-sweaty-in-the-bright-hot-sun craftsman replied. “They were not idiots. Not at all. Smart guys. They knew trigonometry backwards, forwards and sideways.” *High, pot, noose.*

I looked back at the star. “They say that the star’s slight southwest-northeast orientation is parallel with the southern façade of the Taubman Museum,” [in downtown Roanoke] I casted to see if he’d bite.

“An azimuth of zero-six-nine,” he barked off. “Twenty-one degrees north of east.” *Wow! He sure knows this star. / Hubby has met his match.*

“That’s close enough for government work,” I relented.

“Hey, let’s not bash everything public sector,” he riposted. “The majestic Blue Ridge Parkway that is just a mile [1.61 km] or so south of us wouldn’t be here today without the WPA, [Works Progress Administration] ERA [Emergency Relief Administration] and the CCC.” [Civilian Conservation Corps] *He’s probably right. Another legacy of FDR. [President Franklin Delano Roosevelt]*

“Yeah, I know; I’m just busting your chops,” I said with a chuckle. “I actually have a public-sector job in Charlotte.” *Wonder what he will think of that. Hope I can remember all*

of this – or most of it. Sure picked a bad time to forget the DAR. [Digital Audio Recorder] / I bet this guy is an associate professor at a college in North Carolina. What universities are in the Charlotte area? Not Duke [University] – that’s in Durham. Not [the University of North] Carolina – that’s in Chapel Hill. Not Wake Forest [University] – that’s down the road in Winston-Salem. / Bana [husband in Cebuano] just can’t stop babbling to strangers. I’m certain that he has that darn audio recorder going. I just know that this will all go into a future short story. Wonder when it will be posted online. He better let me review and edit it first. Who knows what he’ll have me thinking? The wrong thoughts again, I’m sure.

The corpulent man then gave me a curious look. “A lot of dead weight in your organization?” he asked furtively. *So clandestine acting. Maybe he works in the public sector, too. Should I ask? No, let’s just let him divulge if he wants.*

“We definitely have some *professionals* who would never cut it in the for-profit, no room for slackers, commercial realm,” I admitted. “Yes, we have some employees that those public-sector jokes certainly apply to; some who couldn’t make it anywhere else, yet survive through latent accountability. But, I guess I shouldn’t complain too much; for if I’m so great, why am I where I is?” [sic] *Where I ‘is’? Why did he use the wrong verb conjugation? I bet that it was intentional for some reason. This guy is weird. It’s time to move along. / Hubby is speaking incorrectly on purpose again. Time to end this. Feeling hungry.*

“Well, it’s been most interesting talking with you two,” he summarized in closing, seeming anxious to be done with us. *He’s heard enough of me. / I’ve heard enough of this insane*

redhead. / Wonder what bana and this man are thinking? I've heard enough from both of them. Gosh, I'm so hungry. Need to eat some rice. Soon! That Thai [Continental] place would be great.

"Likewise," Monique chimed.

"Have a nice evening," I added.

The man waddled down towards the parking lot. *Wonder what becomes of him. I guess that he's actually already become – what he is. And, what have I become? A short-story writer who too often resorts to transcribing trivial conversations. Not much drama. No violence. And, no sex. Well, not in most of them. Though, I think my readers know where to find the salacious selections. Sure would be nice if some publisher read some of these, and then e-mailed me. 'You're the next contestant on The Advance is Right. In this round the grand prize is \$60,000, which will be awarded to one lucky winner, who then must write a total of 60,000 words in one year. It can be a novel, two novellas, four novelettes, x number of short stories, or a combination.'* If I were to win, I'd write thirty 2,000-word short stories. Or, maybe twenty-five 2,400-word vignettes. A story a fortnight. *'Ok, ready to play the game, literazzi?' [sic] / I can tell that his mind is somewhere else. He took something. I know it.*

"Earth to space cadet no. 33, do you copy?" Monique shouted.

"Copy what?" I asked, stunned.

"Copy me to an Asian restaurant, Parkaar. I'm HUNGRY!"

Bonus graphics (Free-Ebooks.net exclusive)

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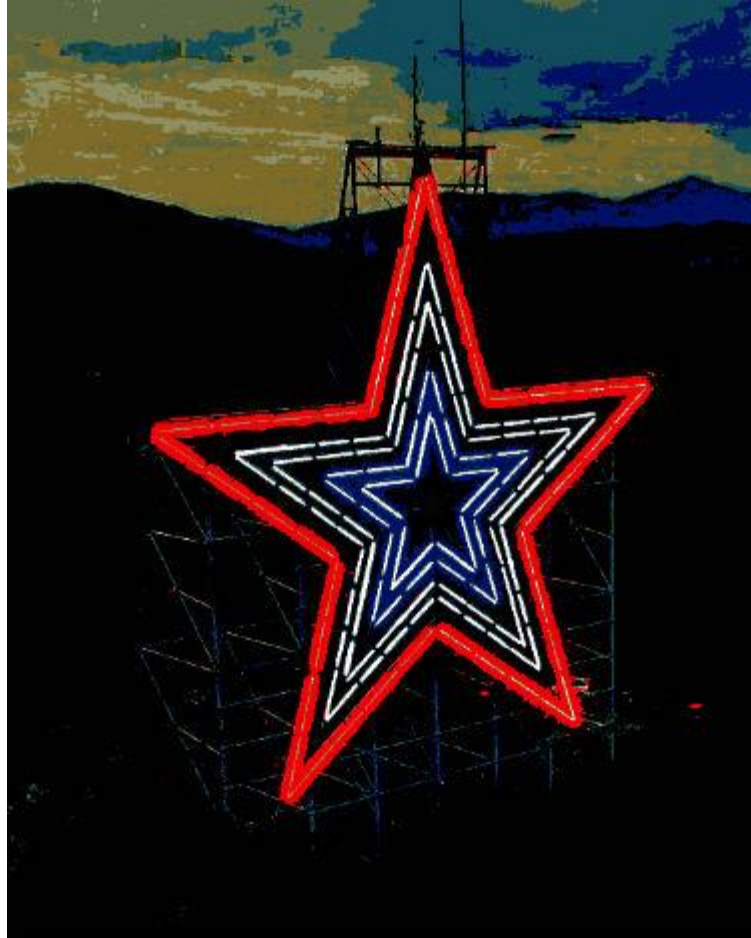
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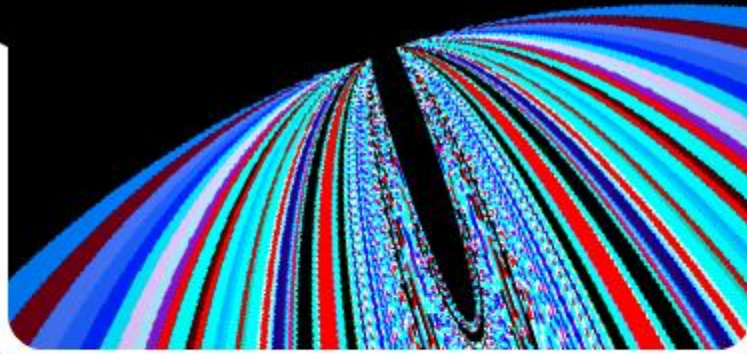
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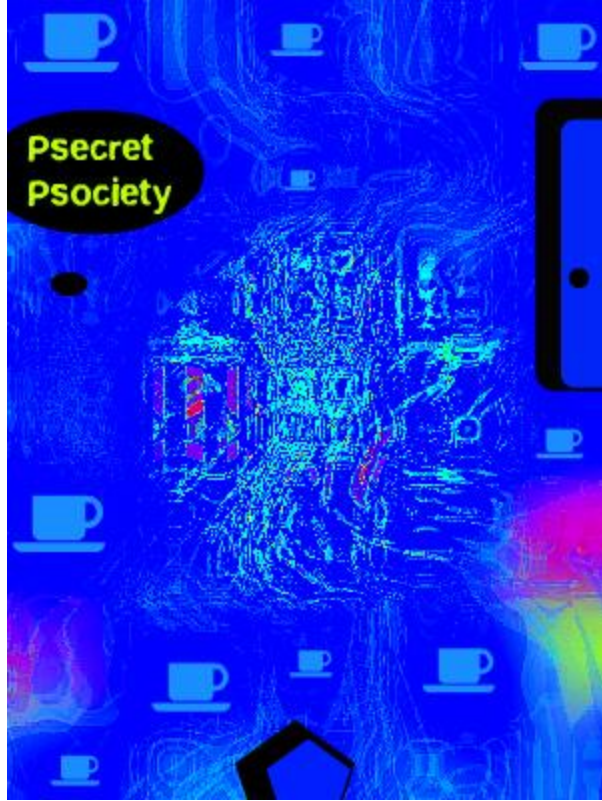


IS A DIABOLICAL MARTIAN PLOT

I'M JUST COLD



SILLY HIPSTER



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