

The Plague

Nobody knows just how the plague started nor why it seemed to settle only in Arizona. Some blamed the water. Some thought government experiments with germ warfare had gotten out of hand. All religious leaders blamed the profligate, rampant impiety and concupiscence of the state. Pat Robertson began foaming at the mouth in mid-sentence on a Sunday morning talk show promoting God's punishment for abortion. Others blamed the administration, either the current one or the past one. Aliens were prominently mentioned.

One morning everyone awoke to find themselves transformed into dark skinned, Latino looking men and women. Wild panic ensued as you might imagine but after a few weeks everybody sort of got used to it.

But not the police business. The cops went nuts. Everyone was a suspect illegal alien. American citizens are not prone to carrying their original birth certificate and passports around with them on the streets, so the jails were bulging.

I happened to be visiting Phoenix that time with my pool shooting friend, Fred. When we looked at ourselves in the mirror at the hotel we screamed until our heads nearly exploded. Even so, when we found out everyone looked similar, we decided to go to the Castle to play some look-ahead eight-ball. The Latino-looking bartender, Melvin, seemed unperplexed and poured two Negra Modelos. Pretty soon the bar began to fill until it looked like El Castillo where Fred and I usually play pool in San Juan Cosala. I heard some weird music coming down the street. "What the hell is that?" I said to Fred. "Sounds like mariachi."

Sure enough as we ran out the front door to see, there was a mob of what seemed to be thousands of dark skinned men with mustaches and giant sombreros, led by two men playing a tuba and trumpet. Several policemen, dark skinned and with mustaches, stopped the band and started mingling with the crowd. Everybody looked like caricatures of Zapata including the cops. "Reminds me of the Hose Brothers," I said to Fred. "Remember how they always seem to be around when there's something weird going on in the U.S.?" The Hose Brothers were Mexican twins we knew who were entrepreneurs,

always finding some way to make big money from various American political foibles.

We walked over to the crowd. “Excuse me, Officer, but what the hell is going on?” I asked him. He spun around and yelled, “Where is your visa?” I was totally perplexed. “Sorry sir,” I replied a little taken aback. “I don’t have a visa. I’m an American.” “Show me your passport,” he yelled. “You look like an illegal alien to me.” “I’m sorry, Officer,” I said nervously. “I don’t have it with me. It’s in my hotel. But pardon me for saying this, but you look about as illegal an alien as I’ve ever seen. Do you have your passport?”

Well, Fred bailed me out of jail where I was stuck in a huge cell with about 300 other dark skinned illegal alien suspects We went back to the Castle not having a clue what to do now. I was about to sink a six ball in the corner pocket when I heard a noise. “Psssst!” the sound made. There it was again, “Psssst!”

I looked up. There sitting at a little table in the back of the bar were the José and Job□ with their musical instruments. I couldn’t believe my eyes. I put down the stick, threw my arms up and shouted, “José!!!!”

“Psssst!” he reiterated. “Must be quiet.”

“Why?” I whispered.

“Business guys might hear,” Job□ said, cupping his hand around his mouth. “Come on over,” he whispered.

Fred and I went over and sat down. Three Negra Modellos later we were “Psssst-ing” so loudly everyone in the room could hear us.

“So what do you think of skin thing?” José asked me.

“I don’t know,” I answered truthfully. “How do you think it happened?”

“Nobody know,” he whispered. “Maybe pharmaceutical experiment. If it stays they make big bucks. Maybe we make big bucks first.”

“What do you mean?” I asked suspiciously.

“Look,” he said pointing to his finger. The tip was white. I nearly fell on the floor backing away.

“How the hell did you do that?” I said when I recovered.

“Josb□, little brother,” he answered matter-of-factly.

The Hose brothers had a genius brother who invented things at MIT. They had used some of his inventions to their advantage before, like when they planted the *lirio*, the water hyacinth he invented that sucked up all the impurities in Lake Chapala. That made the lake the purest water in the world...so they bought up the water rights for next to nothing and sold it exclusively to the Church for holy water, making serious money as usual.

Josb□ came out of the bathroom and sat down. I did fall over this time. He looked completely gringo-ized, light skin from head to toe. Everyone in the bar crowded around him. He held up a jar of cream. Within an hour the bar was solid white. The brothers hugged me, got up and grabbed their tuba and trumpet, leading the gringo entourage into the street. Josb□ pulled out a big sign: “Plague cream for sale.”

Two weeks later the plague was over. Everyone but the cops was elated. Nobody was suspicious any more. But five morose men, totally plastered, with nothing to do, sat in the empty jailhouse mumbling “Aliens...aliens...”

I can hardly wait to see what color the Hose Brothers are next time I see them.