

By the WAY #17

by W. Andrew York
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Ah, spring is coming quickly. Here in Texas we've had a number of days in the 80s; but, today is only in the upper 60s with clear skies. Texas bluebonnets are starting to peek above the grass and kids are starting to play around the apartment complex's pool. Within the next couple of weeks, I expect I'll be going poolside to get some sun and do some reading. I enjoy the renewal of spring, even if we who are this far south don't really have a winter to "renew" from....

My apologies I haven't found the ruleset I've been looking for the "all player" game. On the other hand, I've decided to open up a game of Metropolis. I played this a few times many years ago and enjoyed it (if I recall correctly, in Pete Gaughan's *Perelandra*), so when I found it while looking for the other rules, I thought I'd offer it.

Basically, the game is played on a 3x3 board representing nine city blocks. Eight blocks are divided into ten lots (2x5 layout) with the other being the Park. The goal is to acquire lots and then put buildings on them - assuming the building is available (limited numbers of each), there is the right combination of lots (for multi-lot buildings) and there are no other complications (no factories next to schools).

At game end, points are scored for buildings and their locations. For example, a house has a certain score which is increased if it is on the Park or on a block with a school or store but loses points if next to a factory. There is trading allowed and some limited shared building projects. Let me know if you'd like the full set of rules and I'll send them to you once I get them typed up.

Until next time....

Commentary

Recently, I saw the movie "Be Kind Rewind" with friends at one of the Alamo Drafthouses (see BTW #2). The movie was OK, some very funny moments (most of which were featured in the trailers) melded with a serious theme about saving an old building where jazz musician Fats Waller was purported to have been born. Either could have been stronger stories if told separately, or if the movie was longer than an hour and forty-five minutes. Together they both lacked enough substance to be satisfying.

[[Spoiler Alert - don't read further if you don't want to know some events late in the movie]]

Leading to the ambiguous ending, the last of the movies created by Def and Black's characters is one about the life and times of Fats Waller. Filled with made-up events and remembrances of things that never happened - it creates a fictional biography of the artist. In, and of, itself there is nothing wrong with that premise for a movie. However, one comment by Glover's character that helps spark the movie making, stuck in my mind.

I don't recall the exact quote, but the gist of it was that historical facts are changeable. The specific scene discussed the fact that Fats Waller hadn't been born in that building. Glover comments that he could have been. And, if the facts don't fit your needs, then change them. This leads to the biographical movie which isn't definitively identified as being entirely fiction. All the events in the movie are made up by the community around the store.

That comment, and reasoning behind it, jumped out at me and has been on my mind since then. I can agree that interpretations of historical facts are subject to review, especially when new facts or evidence are uncovered. But, a fact is a fact and isn't subject to change upon a whim or because it is inconvenient. And, a fact isn't subject to dismissal because it doesn't fit a particular agenda - facts cannot be denied until proven to be fabricated or incorrect. To do otherwise is to make the historical record irrelevant and the foundations of today's society of no worth with traditions, religion, government, family ancestry being whatever the individual wishes to meet the needs of "Now". On the contrary, these things are the basic fabric of our society today.

As a disclaimer, I might have this somewhat wrong as it wasn't until after the lines were spoken that they registered with me. For fact checking, I really didn't want to plunk down another \$6.50 (for the matinee) and spend another two hours (don't forget the 20 minutes of previews) to get the quote exact. However, the bottom line is that altering or fabricating historical facts (fictional works excepted) should never happen just to meet an agenda, viewpoint or for personal gain.

Texas Spotlight

In early March, while watching Austin's 24-hour news channel, there was a bit of historical trivia presented - in 1861 Texas became an independent nation for the second time. This was news to me.

Almost everyone is aware that, after the declaration of independence from Mexico on March 2, 1836 and the subsequent victory over their troops at San Jacinto on April 21, 1836, Texas became a country in its own right. That lasted until December 29, 1845 when Texas joined the Union.

But, there was a second independence...on the eve of the Civil War, a Texas referendum was taken and, by more than a 3-1 majority, it determined that the State would secede from the Union. The special convention regarding secession (seated in late January) formally withdrew from the Union on March 2. On March 5, the convention applied for membership in the Confederate States. It was a mere formality as the Confederate government had pre-approved Texas's entry into the Confederacy. However, for those three days, Texas was independent once again.

Two interesting side bars regarding the secession in Texas:

- the US General in charge of military forces in Texas (David E. Twiggs from Georgia) surrendered all military posts, supplies and equipment to the secession convention on February 18, this replaced the American flag with the Lone Star flag.

- Sam Houston, one of the founders of Texas, was governor at the time of secession. A staunch supporter of the Union, he refused to take an oath to the Confederacy and received offers from Lincoln for a commission in the Union army and/or that Lincoln would send federal troops to keep Houston in office. Instead, Houston did nothing. On March 16, 1861, the secession convention summarily declared the office of governor "vacant" and appointed the lieutenant governor (William T. Clark) to fill the position.

Sources: [Lone Star](#) by T. R. Fehrenbach
[Texas: A Modern History](#) by David G. McComb
"Texas in the Civil War" brochure produced by the Texas Historical Commission

LOCs - send them in!

Brendan Whyte: Re your comment on red light traffic cameras. These have been in use in Australia and New Zealand for years. Why is America so behind on the technology? And why is it outsourcing? The police buy cameras, install cameras, monitor cameras, collect fines. No outsourcing.

[WAY] The short answer is that cultural differences are foremost in the delays in putting in red light traffic cameras. I'll briefly touch on a few:

- America isn't behind in the technology. It has been available, and in limited use, for quite some time. Rather, the resistance is cultural - basically the idea of "Big Brother" watching over you and punishing you (the car's owner - not operator) after the fact in an almost "guilty until proven innocent" situation. Using an extreme example, you trade in your car to a dealership for a new car, the dealership transfers the old car to a broker and it eventually is sold to a third party far removed from you without filing a transfer of ownership. The new owners loan the car to another person who runs the red light. In response, the outsourcing company computers automatically send you a civil fine (with no human intervention) as you are the last registered owner. At this point, you either must pay the fine, face the penalties for failure to pay or you are required to prove that you no longer own the vehicle. That you weren't driving the car is not a defense as the fine falls upon the "owner".

- As for the outsourcing, since the Reagan administration, there has been a trend to outsource anything that isn't core governmental functions to the private sector. There are a number of factors behind this, from shrinking the size of government, promoting public sector competition to drive down cost and keeping government focused on governing and not on peripheral activities (housekeeping, building security, mail processing, etc). As "red light" enforcement is a civil action (no criminal penalties as the vehicle owner, not the person who did the act, is targeted), akin to parking tickets, it is a key candidate for outsourcing.

This has created some interesting situations with the private business keyed to profits - the more fines issued, the more money they collect (a set fee for each violation) and more violations per camera reduces the fixed cost per incident. I've seen some news reports where the cameras were set inaccurately and would send out notices to individuals who, though pushing the limits, had not run the red light. And, of course, you (as the vehicle owner) are required to pay the fine unless you can prove that the incident didn't happen.

- There is an impression that cities' really started using the cameras as a revenue generator - not as a means to reduce accidents or improve public safety. The cameras have a low direct cost to the city, especially if a favorable contract is made with the providing company. In a best case scenario, the company absorbs all of the costs for installing the equipment, operating the cameras and sending out the bills. The only cost to the city, beyond minimal routine administrative oversight, is for any hearings. That cost is easily outweighed by the revenue received after the company takes their cut (especially if you set a high fine amount).

In response to this impression, the Texas legislature in their last session capped the money that a city can receive from the cameras (\$75/incident, if I remember correctly). If the city wishes to set a higher amount, in the interest of public safety, they are free to do so. However, any excess funds must be remitted to the State.

- There also is a strong concern that installation of the cameras just transfers overall problem elsewhere. By cutting down on folks running red lights, other drivers concerned about being caught become overly cautious when approaching intersections. In response, the point is made that rear-end collisions increase while accidents caused by red light running decrease - basically trading one type of accident for another.

Since the last column, in Lubbock (Texas), primarily this argument has led to that City terminating their use of red light cameras. The state legislator from the area has already said in the next session (Spring 2009), he will introduce a bill to prohibit the use of the cameras across the entire state.

Well, that's more than I'd intended to say on the subject. Any comments from the readership?

Review: "Jamie at Home" is Jamie Oliver's new half-hour series on the Food Network. It premiered about three months ago, running at 8:30 central time on Saturday mornings. Working out of his home, it is an intimate and unpretentious presentation. For instance, in one episode he's in his garden and walks over to some produce, slipping on a rail. Rather than reshoot or otherwise edit it, he includes the mishap and makes light of it in the production notes.

The food and cooking techniques are very down-to-earth. Each episode is themed around an ingredient, such as "Winter Veg", "Pumpkins & Squash" and "Wild Game" while the recipes are very approachable and something that just about any home cook could prepare in their home kitchen. I don't recall any fancy equipment or hard-to-obtain ingredients that he used without mentioning a common substitute.

The atmosphere is almost back to his original "Naked Chef" series; but, with a more confident and poised Jamie that still exudes a passion for food. Definitely look it up and enjoy it!

Movie Watch: Spiderwick Chronicles (B-), Be Kind Rewind (C)

Observation: The first of the television shows produced since the writers' strike are starting to hit the small screen - and I'm increasingly of the opinion, in most cases, of "so what?". Many of the shows I watched out of habit I doubt I'll continue with. On the plus side, I'll have more reading time as well as the opportunity to enjoy quality reruns (on TV as well as DVD) and movies.

Playlist for this issue: History Channel's "Protestant Reformation"; Dolly Parton's "Backwoods Barbie" CD; "Juno" Soundtrack; Neil Diamond "Tennessee Moon"; CBS Evening News

===== **GAME SECTION** =====

On TAP:

A new "Everyone Plays" game (Open to Anyone at Any Time!)
Metropolis (4-5 players wanted) - rules available upon request
Let me know what else you're interested in seeing here.....(sorry, we're out of Guinness)

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OK - I've not found the ruleset I've been looking for to start the "everyone plays" game. Next time I hope!

Submit Email entries and comments to wandrew88 of gmail.com or
by mail to W Andrew York; POB 201117; Austin TX 78720-1117

Deadline is: April 19, 2008 at high noon Central Time