

Will the Last Person to Leave the Planet Please Shut Off the Sun?

by Mike Resnick

It started with the Jews.

One day they announced that they were emigrating to the world of New Jerusalem. Just like that. Not even so much as a by-your-leave.

"We are tired of being under-appreciated and over-persecuted," said their statement. "We gave you the Old Testament and the Ten Commandments, relativity and quantum mechanics, the polio vaccine and interstellar travel, Hollywood and Miami Beach and Sandy Koufax, the 6-Day War of 1967 and the 23-Minute War of 2041, and frankly, we've had it with you guys. Live long and prosper and don't call us, we'll call you."

And the next day they were gone, every last one of them.

It was June 21, 2063. I still remember my friend Burt passing out _Earth: Love It Or Leave It_ t-shirts to all the guys at work, and saying that we were well rid of them and that _now_ things were going to get better in a hell of a hurry.

Then, three months later, Odingo Nkomo announced that the Kikuyu were leaving for Beta Piscium IV, and then Joshua Galawanda took the Zulus to Islandhwana II, and almost before you could turn around, Africa was empty except for a few Arabs in the north and a handful of Indians who quickly booked passage back to Bombay.

Well, this didn't bother anyone very much, because nobody really cared about Africa anyway, and suddenly there were two billion less mouths to feed and some of the game parks started showing signs of life. But then Moses Smith demanded that the U.S. government supply transportation to all American blacks who wanted to leave, and Earl Mingus ("the Pride of Mississippi"), who had just succeeded to the presidency, agreed on the spot, and suddenly we had an all-white nation.

Well, _almost_ all-white. Actually, it took another year for Harvey Running Horse to convince all his fellow Amerinds to accompany him to Alphard III, which he had renamed Little Big Horn.

"Now," said Burt, popping open a beer, "if we could just get rid of the Hispanics, and maybe the Catholics..."

The Hispanics headed off for Madrid III two months later, and Burt threw a big party to celebrate. "I'm finally proud to be an Amurrican agin!" he announced, and hung a huge flag outside his front door.

Of course, it wasn't just the blacks and Jews and Hispanics who were emigrating, and it wasn't just America and Africa that were getting emptier. The Chinese left the next year, followed by the Turks, the Bulgarians, the Indians, the Australians, and the French Polynesians. It didn't even make headlines when the Cook County Democratic Machine went off to Daleyworld, which figured to be the only planet that was ever turned into a smoke-filled back room.

"Great!" proclaimed Burt. "We finally got room to breathe and stretch our legs."

Things kind of settled down for a couple of years then, and life got pretty easy, and we hardly noticed that the Brits, the Germans, the Russians, the Albanians, the Sunis and the Shiites had all gone.

"Wonderful!" said Burt on the day the Greeks and the Pakistanis left. "So maybe we still wear gas masks because of the pollution, and the water still ain't safe to drink, and we ain't quite gotten over our little

problem with Eight Mile Island" -- that was the problem that turned it into thirty-two Quarter Mile Islands -- "but, by God, what's a little inconvenience compared to a world run by and for 100% pure Amurricans?"

I suppose we should have seen the handwriting on the wall when the NFL moved the Alaska Timberwolves and the Louisiana Gamblers, the last two franchises still on Earth, to the Quinellus Cluster. There were other little hints, too, like using downtown Boston to test out the new J-Bomb, or the day the Great Lakes finally turned solid with sludge.

That was when the real emigration started, right in our back yard, so to speak. Nevada, Michigan, and Florida were the first to go; then New Hampshire and Delaware, then Texas, and then it was Katie-bar-the-door. For the longest time I really thought California would stick around, but they finally located a world with a 9,000-mile beach and a native populace that specialized in making sandals and cheap gold jewelry, and suddenly the United States of America began at St. Louis and ended about 60 miles west of Council Bluffs.

"Let 'em go," counselled Burt. "We never needed 'em anyway. And there's just that much more for the rest of us, right?"

Except that things kept happening. The ice cap slipped south all the way to Minneapolis, Mount Kilimanjaro started pouring lava down onto the Serengeti Plains, the Mediterranean boiled away, the National Hockey League went bankrupt, and people kept leaving.

That was almost ten years ago.

There are only eight of us left now. Burt was pressed into duty as World President this week, because Arnie Jenkins hurt his wrist and can't sign any documents, and Sybil Miller, who was supposed to succeed Arnie, has her period and says she doesn't feel like it.

We haven't gotten any mail or supplies in close to a year now. They say that Earth is too polluted and dangerous to land on any more, so Burt figured it was his Presidential duty to take one of our two remaining ships to Mars Base and pick up the mail, and bring Arnie back his yearly supply of cigarettes.

I stopped by his office this morning to return a socket wrench I had borrowed, and I saw a letter addressed to me sitting on his desk, so I opened it and read it.

I been mulling it over, and I decided that I was all wrong about this after all. I mean, being World President is all well and good, but not when your only duties are taking out the garbage and picking up the mail. A World President needs an army and navy to keep the peace, and lots of people paying taxes, and stuff like that. I hate to leave now that we're finally down to nothing but 100% pure and loyal Americans, but the fact of the matter is that there ain't no point to being President every eighth week without no perks and no fringes, so I'm off to the big wide galaxy to see if anyone out there wants a guy with Presidential experience. I'll be happy to take over the reins of any government what wants me, so long as it's white and Christian and mostly American and has a football team. In fact, I don't even have to be President; I got no serious objections to hiring on as King.

Do me a favor and post this one last official message for me.

And there was a printed sign saying, WILL THE LAST PERSON TO LEAVE THE PLANET PLEASE SHUT OFF THE SUN?

I can't tell you how relieved the rest of us are. Burt was okay for a Baptist, but you know what they say about Baptists.

Now if we can just find a way to get rid of Myrtle Bremmer and that Presbyterian claptrap she's always spouting, we'll finally have an America that I'm proud to be a part of.

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