

## ONE DAY IN THE LIFE OF IVAN NEWYORKERVICH

By Pat LoBrutto

It wasn't an eventful trip....thank God. You don't want an eventful trip on the Subway; that's why you've developed the radar for which so many New Yorkers are justly proud. I've taken this trip so often -- twice a day, 5 days a week since 1961 (I took the subway to High School), with 4 years off for Good Behavior when I went to college at chi-chi Fairfield, Connecticut-- that I hardly registered the noise, the jerking ride, the unimaginative graffiti scrawls; not to mention the filth and the weirdos from central casting (through my radar did inform me that none of them were dangerous, at the moment).

I was on a mission, and, friends, I was in a rush. I was already about 40 minutes late for everything-- hell, I was *always* late-- on a day with no free time. I know, I know I should have given myself more than one hour. Okay, rearrange the schedule; cancel some appointments, but, whatever happens, the books have to go into production today, or else. No one ever blew a schedule on an SF book. Ever. In all the history of Doubleday SF. Nobody. The books, by the way, were *The Supernatural Tales of Fitz-James O'Brien Volume I Macabre Stories* and *The Supernatural Tales of Fitz-James O'Brien Volume II Dream Stories and Fantasies*, two wonderful books edited by Jessica Amanda Salmonson. O'Brien was an important and rather surreal bohemian before the War Between the States. There were 2 minor stories that Jessica couldn't get copies of anywhere but the New York Public LibI3ry. These stories, "The Man Without a Shadow" and "The Wonderful Adventures of Mr. Papplewick" had been published in 1853 in *The Lantern*, and avant-garde newspaper that published for only a few years. I was on a mission.

I got off the subway at Times Square and began the walk to Fifth Avenue. It was just as gross as usual. The streets and storefronts were littered with the homeless, with litter, with howlers and pimps hanging out in porno-shop doorways. It was an existence based on adrenaline... but there was this overwhelming honky-tonk hopelessness just beneath the surface. It would be too much to bear if the part of me that cared weren't insulated by the bullet proof mind vest for which too many New Yorkers are so proud. There was, however, a great mime on Sixth and 42nd doing an astronaut in free fall: he used a chair, the strength of his arms and an inhuman balance.

And there, through the thin line of trees and the drug dealers of Bryant Park, it was, white and pure as rational thought. Standing solid in the sunlight like Captain America, and they sure don't build Beaux-Arts like that anymore.

Better get moving... Okay, I'm across Sixth Avenue and no one has attempted to mug me. I stopped for a minute to watch the chess and backgammon hustlers. It was 10:00 and most were engaged in the furious Manhattan style of express chess: moves made quickly, pounding the two-faced time clocks. Attack! Attack! A fleamarket along the park and library was in full swing-- exotic jewelry, art, handmade everything. Maybe I'll stop on my way out... I could skip lunch... Better get moving.

Around to Fifth Avenue to the magnificent front entrance. Some asshole once wanted to tear it all down and put up a parking lot, here. I stood for a moment, radar alert for pickpockets, jostled by a bustling throng; feeling like some hick Danite before the Temple of Solomon. "Oh. Brave New York!" I paraphrased, "That has such wonders in it!" We get to talk like that in Manhattan. Mounting the steps and terraces that lead to the front door, I have to maneuver

around the people sprawled and seated everywhere. This is a resting place for some, a lunchroom for many, an office for others; a Greek Theatre for preachers, break dancers, vendors, musicians and magicians. On hot summer afternoons it was the circus of Dr. Lao. My friend, Joe, and I once spent 6 hours on a Saturday just sitting and watching... we coulda stayed 6 hours more, and never have gotten bored or hungry.

Past the lions and into the cool echo, the agelessness, the aloofness. It's open only to those who ask except on Thursdays. The main foyer of the library is a marvel of beauty, utility and majesty. Walking up one of the two marble staircases, I turn to look down from the second floor gallery. Left and right stretched clean and straight hallways with busts, paintings, maps and exhibition cases-- before me, hustling and crowded was Fifth Avenue and 41st Street, yet Babylon was outside, voiceless. Pure light streamed into this sanctuary. Behind me were the stairs.

The third floor. You emerge into the McGraw Rotunda. The ceiling and walls are decorated with Edward Laining's series of paintings called "The Story of the Recorded Word." Shafts of light pulse, people stream to and fro surrounded by that odd flat echo familiar in every palace from Khufu's to Khrushchev's. Some people work here, some do their work here, some are passing through. I was on a mission from God.

Into room 315, the Public Catalog Room, where all the possessions of the library are listed in a system covering the walls, spilling over into computer banks... Serviced by pneumatic message tubes. I tell the librarians what I need, and they tell me the possible ways of finding what I want. A happy hour spent in research. Ahhh, so often the chase is more nourishing than the blood. I find the call number of the bound copies of "The Lantern."

Into the Call Room. Chairs and tables in a room large enough for several hundred people. Wood, wood, everywhere, shining from decades of use. The 2 story high walls are lined with books-- *Catalog of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon*, *Gryimek's Encyclopedia of Ecology*, *The Oxford Companion to World Sports and Games*, *The Year's Work in Classical Studies 1906-1939* in 22 volumes, *A Geo-Bibliography of Anamolies*... A room full of people just sitting and reading, yet the busy feeling of action has the dust notes dancing. This huge room is split into two large rooms by an elaborate wooden divider. On one side it is the Call Desk where you present call slips. The books are then called up from the stacks usually within a half-hour. The opposite side of the divider is noisier and has fewer people reading. This is where you can Xerox anything for 25¢ a page.

Up comes the volume containing "The Lantern" for 1852-1853. When the green solid volume arrives, I leaf through a book, bound in 1853, used only a few times in 60 years. I have the stories copied. On my way out, I linger on a marble bench on a stairway landing surrounded by ideas.

Here comes the pretentious stuff.

With these ideas we can alter the course of events, change our own lives. This library is a temple dedicated to scratching the desperate itch; an unfinished recording of the vain, foolish, noble work of asking the unanswerable questions, of learning what we were not meant to know. This, or love, or both together, is the only balm for our broken hearts.

But, before a moment, I must face the fierce anger of the Four Million and the Four Hundred; the noise and the danger and the filth... A gap opens in the Rat Race... I make my move... I'm in, and gone...

I hate New York.

I love New York.