

Dashiell Hammett Society of Studs San Francisco International Headquarters

Officers

President (the PREZ)
Communications Czar
Procurer of Venues
AgendaMeister
Archivist of Knowledge

Bill Diefenbach
Geoff Noakes
Lee Tyree
Ken Monk
Dale Fehringer

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Minutes of Meeting

Café Majestic

Wednesday January 24, 2007

Assembling at the Bar

"The important thing is to have rhythm ... always have rhythm in your shaking. Now a manhattan, you shake to a fox trot. A bronx* to two-step time. But a dry martini you always shake to waltz time."

-- Nick Charles in *The Thin Man* (1934)

No one seems to know for sure whether Dashiell drank here. In fact, no one seems to know very much for sure about anything. We heard that Joan Fontaine and Olivia de Havilland lived at the hotel, and that Nicholas Cage and Sean Connery drank at the hotel's bar when they were in town to film *The Rock*. And the hotel has suites named after Diane Feinstein and Willie Brown,

* This drink has enjoyed over a century of popularity. It was created at the Big Brass Rail, a bar in the Waldorf Hotel (before the Astoria Wing was built). The Waldorf-Astoria later moved uptown and the Empire State Building now stands in it's place.

1 1/2oz. Gin
1/2 oz. Sweet Vermouth
1/2 oz. Dry Vermouth
2 oz. Orange Juice
dash Angostura Bitters
Orange Slice for garnish

Combine ingredients (except the orange slice) together in a shaker with ice.
Shake well. Strain into a cocktail glass, or over ice in an old fashion glass.

so they may have spent a night or two. But, beyond that no one seems to know very much for sure.

One thing we do know for sure -- this is the *kind* of bar Dashiell spent time in, and if it was good enough for him, it's good enough for us.



So we met for drinks at the bar of The Hotel Majestic. Our only companions were two well-seasoned birds who kept to themselves and sipped from gigantic glasses of white wine. The bartender was on a first-name basis with them, and coaxed an extra tip by asking about their families.

We arrived about the same time: Dale (Archivist of Knowledge) was first, followed by Geoff (Communication Czar), Bill (the Prez), Ken (AgendaMeister), and Lee (Procurer of Venues). It was a full house.

The Bird arrived with the Prez and sat quietly on the floor awaiting further instructions. It was the first topic of discussion.

Flipping the Bird

The Prez led us through the Bird's history and options for the future. The Bird is the real imitation falcon from the movie *The Maltese Falcon*, and the symbol of the DHSOS. Having the Bird in one's home is an honor not to be taken lightly.

For the last year, the Bird has rotated among the DHSOS membership in alphabetic order by first name, and passed on at each DHSOS meeting. Each member has displayed the Bird in his home, along with its trappings; which includes a wooden box, twine, papers, and bag. The Prez also recently added an antique wooden pedestal, to elevate the Bird to its proper height.

A survey of society members revealed varied feelings about the Bird: Lee and Bill like it and want it in their houses. Dale and Ken are indifferent about it (Dale's wife is anything but indifferent). Geoff was hard to read.

The Prez proposed three options for passing the Bird in the future:

- Option A: Same as last year
- Option B: Lee's house all year
- Option C: "Optional" option (each member can take it or pass it on).

Sam Spade: Now, let's talk about the black bird.

Kasper Gutman: Let's, Mr. Spade. Have you any conception of how much money can be got for that black bird?

Sam Spade: No.

Kasper Gutman: Well, sir, if I told you... If I told you half... you'd call me a liar.

Sam Spade: No, not even if I thought so.

The Society took a vote and decided on Option C. Dale was next in line, and he elected to take his turn with the Bird.[†]



Note: Since the meeting, the Maltese Falcon at John's Grill was stolen ([click here for more](#)). This bird caper made front page headlines in the SF Chronicle and stirred up the DHSOS. Some members suggested offering our Bird as a replacement -- a kind and generous gesture that was vetoed by the Prez.



Lee says the talk around the Flood Building is very skeptical that a robbery even took place. Many people remember that John's Grill burned about 20 years ago. After much gnashing of teeth about the loss of the memorabilia, when the restaurant reopened six months later all the memorabilia magically reappeared. Lee says the owner of John's Grill is a magician, and a good PR man, who got his restaurant totally refurbished by the insurance company.

[†] Note: Since the meeting, Dale took the Bird home, where it was rejected by his spousal unit. This is a sad situation, and one that further indicates the lack of control he has over his spouse. Under the newly-approved Option C, he has passed it on to Geoff.

The Setting

Drinks were consumed in the bar of The Hotel Majestic. Dinner was served in the hotel restaurant, the Café Majestic.

The Hotel Majestic

(by Lee Tyree)

The Hotel Majestic was originally constructed in 1902 as a private residential hotel by Milton Schmitt, a turn-of-the-century railroad magnate and influential member of the California State Legislature. It was an upscale hotel, which competed for guests with other fine hotels like The Palace Hotel. Senator Schmitt moved into The Palace Hotel when his home was demolished to make room for the Majestic Hotel.



The architect was none other than the famous Alexander Oakey, but who cares about architects anyway. The answer is: no one. The mansion was converted to a hotel in the 1920's. The building exterior has been meticulously restored to its former grandeur during the 1980's using original photographs to guide the restoration. Over the years the hotel has received numerous awards for architecture, interior decor, as well as for service and comfort.

For nearly a decade, the Majestic was the permanent residence of actresses Joan Fontaine and Olivia de Havilland. It has always attracted members of the performing arts crowd. More recently, Academy Award winning actor Nicholas Cage stayed in the hotel on various occasions, generally when one of his many wives kicked his ass out of his own house.

The bar and restaurant have experienced ups and downs over the years, having been closed from time to time. Each time the hotel reopened, changes were made that eliminated some of its original glamour. Until a few years ago, the atmosphere was very dark and featured a horseshoe shaped mahogany bar with a polished granite top from a Paris whore house. It is no longer there -- the whores wanted it back. Pity! With the latest renovation, the atmosphere has been lightened so that it is not as dark and studly as it once was. Never-the-less, we needed to experience this venue if only because of its magnificent history.

Lee is certain that Dashiell Hammett not only ate and drank in the Majestic in his hay day, but he has it on good authority that Dashiell shacked up there many times screwing assorted women from the elite social circles of San Francisco.

Café Majestic



We were escorted to our table, which while not completely round (the DHSOS generally dines at round tables) at least had two rounded corners. The waiter offered dinner suggestions, took drink orders, and left.

Cheap Wine

Geoff suggested that he has found Australian wine to be inexpensive, plentiful, and good; including Yellowtail, at around \$4.00 a bottle. He said he has "never had a bad bottle of wine," to which Ken replied that he had -- at Bill's house.

The Kids

The Prez gave an update on the Society's children: Christina and Beck Diefenbach. Both are doing well. 'Stina is heavily involved in a theatre production and won't be able to attend Beck's graduation this May. Beck is working on a feature article about ROTC at the University of Illinois, getting up at 6:00 AM to photograph and interview subjects. 'Stina is trying to decide if and where to sell her car, in anticipation of moving back to SF.

Lee's Spam Problem



Lee continues to have an email spam problem, and he has finally decided to solve it by going to a new account for email activity. Currently,

Lee receives around 120 emails per day – most of which are spam.

For reasons unclear to the DHSOS, Lee has rejected all of Geoff's suggestions for solving his problem. This may be an instance of "some people just live through the pain."

Lee's reply: The fact is, the only solution ever offered by this "internet expert" was for me to get a new email address, which is in fact very painful, but it is what I am making plans to do. So what the hell is he talking about? What suggestions of his did I reject? Please present them again, oh please, guru master. I will hold tight with my plans until I hear from you.

Politics

Politics was on the minds of Society members, as several Democratic and Republican presidential aspirants have recently announced their intentions to run. At this point, DHSOS members seem largely uninterested and undecided among the candidates, but they are looking forward to a spirited campaign.



Chronicle / Paul Chinn

And speaking of spirited, local SF politics have picked up again, as the same day Mayor Newsom kicked off his re-election

campaign the news broke that he had an affair with an employee, who is also the wife of Newsom's campaign manager and close friend.

When the Gavin Newsom scandal broke, most of us assumed the public reaction would be a no-brainer. Sleeping with a married woman? How do you think that would play with wives, girlfriends and single women in the Bay Area?

As a Newsom staffer told a Chronicle reporter, there goes the women's vote.

But a funny thing happened after the headlines hit and the buzz began: Many women said they were ready to forgive and forget.

Not men, though. No way. Many said they would never trust Newsom again as long as they lived. Some were livid; many were incredulous.

The difference? Apparently it is the Man Code, a set of rigid but unwritten boundaries over which no man may step. Break the Man Code, and you're toast.

-- C.W. Nevius, San Francisco Chronicle

Gavin's breaking of the "Man Code" left the DHSOS pondering an unknown future:

- Will the scandal affect Gavin's ratings, and will he still run for re-election?
- Will he continue to date underage women?
- Will people in the Midwest continue to say "it's a wonder any men in SF still sleep with women?"



Barry, Barry and the Giants

There was surprisingly little discussion of the Giants recent signings of Barry Bonds and Barry Zito. There appeared to be little enthusiasm for the team that the Giants have assembled this year, (which looks much like the team the Giants assembled a few years ago; with Rich Aurilia, Russ Ortiz, Pedro Feliz, Barry Bonds, Ray Durham, Todd Linden, and Eliezer Alfonzo) and little confidence that this season will be different from the last. Geoff and Ken, who support the A's and Dodgers, were somewhat smug during this discussion.

The group agreed to attend a Giants game this summer, and Dale agreed to organize it. Ken even agreed to stoop to coming to SF for a game.

49ers and A's Leaving Town

A stirring discussion ensued about the San Francisco 49ers and Oakland A's leaving their home towns. Society

members think it's a shame the teams are moving, and expressed their thoughts about whether the A's will be known as the Fremont As or Oakland As after their move.

The Prez gave an elongated tirade about the 49ers parking situation should they move to Santa Clara, relating that nearby companies aren't likely to voluntarily offer their parking lots for 49ers fans, and the fallacy of sharing a Great America parking lot with 49er parking on some Sundays. He summed up his thoughts by stating, "I don't know the facts – but that's my opinion."

Revenue for Sports Franchises

The financial discussion centered on the changing sources of revenue for professional sports teams -- between attendance, television, and the Internet.

Ken reported that Major League Baseball now receives more income from its Web site (\$5 billion a year) than from any other source.

Men Are From Mars



Men and women often see things differently. As a case in point, we discussed how they view a good evening out.

DHSOS spouses celebrate their birthdays by getting together for dinner

at a fancy restaurant. They get dressed up, sit at a square table, and talk simultaneously and continuously throughout the meal. Consequently, no one really knows what was said, and they come home confused and out-of-sorts. On the other hand, DHSOS members wear whatever they had on during the day, sit at a round table, and carry on a well-orchestrated, intellectual discussion. We come home satiated and satisfied

"I distrust a man that says when. It he's got to be careful not to drink too much it's because he's not to be trusted when he does."

-- The Fat Man to Sam Spade in *The Maltese Falcon*

We agreed that DHSOS meetings are superior, and patted ourselves on the back. Lee is concerned that the ladies might find out how much fun we are having and want to "merge" the two get-togethers.

After a brief discussion, we decided that's **not** going to happen. Lee will check out some "dives" for future DHSOS meetings, to cement the deal.

Call to Order

The Prez called the meeting to order at 8:35PM.

Sanctions

The first order of business was to consider sanctions on the Communications Czar, for suggesting termination of the Bird flipping. The topic and the discussion went nowhere.

College Football

There was a discussion of the recently-concluded college football bowl games. In a surprise move, The Prez admitted

that the Fiesta Bowl was an embarrassing game for Michigan, and that USC was the superior team. This effectively eliminated Geoff's chance to gloat, and the discussion moved on.

The group agreed that the best bowl game was the Orange Bowl between Oklahoma and Boise State.

After falling behind 35-28, the Broncos tied the game with a stunning 50-yard touchdown play on fourth-and-18 with 7 seconds to play. Zabransky hit Drisan James at Oklahoma's 35, and James pitched the ball to Jerard Rabb, who raced into the end zone.



But the Broncos weren't through. Broncos quarterback Jared Zabransky looked at three wide receivers to his right, then handed the ball behind his back to Johnson, who raced

untouched into the end zone.

Pro Football

SuperBowl season was upon us, and a poll was taken to see which Society members were pulling for which team. It was pretty clear there was little interest. The final toll was Bears 2 (Dale and Ken), The Colts 2 (Bill and Lee), and the commercials 1 (Geoff).

Cell Phone Dilemma



Bill needs a new cell phone plan for Christina and Beck and Dale needs a

new plan for him and Patty. The group advised them to let their existing contract expire, see what offers came from the old providers, then approach competing providers and compare offers.

Parking Meters

This is a diverse group, and we talk about diverse topics. For example, we held a discussion about parking meter revenue in San Francisco. Last week, San Francisco supervisors expressed shock over a report that parking meters are pulling in only a fraction of the revenue they should realize in this city where competition for parking space can be cutthroat.

It seems the city's 23,000 meters collect an average of \$2.61 to \$5.59 a day, and over the past three years, the city has collected \$77.6 million in parking meter revenue, well below the \$83.5 million originally forecast. Since it costs \$1.50 per hour to park at a SF meter, each meter could yield up to \$36 per day.

San Francisco officials have lots of excuses for the shortfall. Muni spokesman Judson True said that antiquated, broken meters were to blame five years ago. Since then, San Francisco has invested in thousands of digital meters, which have proved to be more reliable.

Now, True has several new excuses; including disabled parking placards, yellow loading zones, parking reserved for construction and motorcycles, and a shortage of parking enforcement officers.

The DHSOS agreed the problem will continue as long as they are not in charge.

Blogs and Podcasts

Blogs: Poorly written first-person journal entries with no facts, mostly done by amateurs for free.

-- Tim Goodman, in the *SF Chronicle*.

A short discussion of blogging and podcasts revealed that few DHSOS members have interest or use for either. Geoff was kind enough to explain to Dale what a podcast actually was. The rest of the Society used this opportunity to freshen their drinks.

Advertising Trends

The DHSOS is always teetering on the cutting edge, which we proved again during a discussion of recent advertising trends. Technology – from wireless devices to iPods to digital video recorders (DVRs) – have given time-pressed consumers more choices and control over what they tune in or tune out – and also split the audience into narrower slices.

USAToday reported that consumers now encounter 3,500 to 5,000 marketing messages per day, vs. 500 to 2,000 in the 1970s, and they “tune out” standard TV ads, or use DVRs to race through them.

So advertisers are trying new ways to get us to buy their crap. Ken mentioned an interesting approach he had observed:

Mini Cooper doesn't advertise to heighten tension or interest. Instead, they recently created a Web site for the fictional "Counter Counterfeit Commission" (<http://www.counterfeitmini.org>). This Web site, which has drawn 38 million hits, warns consumers of "Mini fakes" (essentially any non-Mini vehicle), and it invites them to send in photos of such

fakes. YouTube has also weighed in on this ([click here](#)).

Death of CDs

We talked about how downloading songs is doing away with sales of CDs, and we toasted the demise of long-time SF music store, Tower Records.

According to the *Washington Post*, the full-length CD format, which debuted in 1981, last year sold 766.9 million copies, down from a high of 942.5 million in 2000. At the same time, online sales -- championed by the popular Apple Computer Inc. iTunes Web site -- is picking up part of the slack: 139.4 million tracks were sold online in 2004.

The digitization of music has created a shift in how tunes are shared and consumed. Because it's faster to copy and transmit digital music, more people are copying and sharing tracks -- prompting copyright concerns from the entertainment industry. On the other hand, the cheapness of Internet distribution allows many no-names to release music that otherwise might never be seen or heard outside a garage.

Lee agreed this is a problem, and mentioned he is having a much harder time buying eight-track tapes.

Valentine's Day

A poll was taken to see how the Studs celebrate Valentine's Day with their sweethearts. Most exchange cards; some give flowers and other stuff. It seems this is a rather sentimental group, after all.

Saint Valentine's Day or Valentine's Day is the traditional day on which lovers express their love for each other; sending Valentine's cards and candy, often anonymously.

The Greeting Card Association estimates that approximately one billion valentines are sent each year worldwide, making the day the second largest card-sending holiday of the year behind Christmas. The association estimates that women purchase approximately 85 percent of all valentines.

Read a Good Book?

All DHSOS members are engrossed in good books. This is, after all, a literary Society. Bill is working his way through the *Letters of Dashiell Hammett*; Dale is reading Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep*. Ken just finished reading *1776*, and is giving his brain a rest before moving on. Lee is part-way through *The Audacity of Hope* by Barack Obama.

All agreed to exchange completed books at the next meeting.

Adjournment

We seemed to be the last ones in the place, and the help was waiting for us to wrap it up and leave. So we paid the check, issued hearty handshakes all around, and walked out into the foggy night air.

That's it for now, Man.

The next meeting of the DHSOS will take place at a suitable location on Wednesday, April 18, 2007.

