

Subway Spar

I have always found the floor of a train fascinating. I see the regular battalions of sneakers and Doc Martens, the desert of Dorito sand under the seats, a cocktail of fluids one may be so bold to call a cocktail, but today I saw a man sitting cross-legged on the floor. Most travelers had the same New York reaction to this man, complete blissful ignorance. However, as the train kept trudging through its stops, most travelers left, but the man remained, his eyes closed and completely silent. The train keeps rocking side to side, but the man is perfectly still. I was sitting on the opposite side of the bogie, staring at the man. Is the term bogie? Where I'm from I, swear that's what they call them. New York needs to have a dictionary that I can use. I apologize for getting distracted. My mind wanders on the train. Coming back to the man, his face could be considered the calmest in the world or the blindest, and I could not take my eyes off him.

As the train rolls into the Bowery, a young student in his early twenties walks into the train while on FaceTime with his friend. He sits down in front of a much older man who marched in just before him, the man on the floor is sitting right between them, leaning against a subway pole. The student is wearing what I see most students wear, a dangling airpod along with a graphic T-shirt and shorts. I spent my first couple of weeks in this city dodging their skateboards, one time, I saw an older woman get hit in the shin by a skateboard. The young man's response was a simple "My bad," and there I go getting distracted again. The older man in front of him was scratching his beard and making the U-shaped face most older men make when scratching their beard. You know where they extend their bottom lip forward. The man on the floor has piqued the student's interest, and he flips his camera to show the man-

"Yo, Look at this monk!"

Before his friend can interject, the older gentleman takes a look at the man on the floor and exclaims

"That ain't a monk, son. That's a crackhead."

"Excuse me?"

The older man mimes to the student to take off his AirPods.

"Crackhead. Not a monk."

The student, surprised by this response, hangs up on his friend and turns to face the older man. The older man has his hands crossed and is leaning back against the seat. There is a brief moment of silence where all we can hear is the movement of the train.

“Sir, that is not a junkie.”

“Buddy, you must be new here. If you see a weirdo on a train, they’re a crackhead.”

The student, visibly offended by the older man’s claim, shuffles up to the edge of his seat. The older man reclines further back and has a smug, matter-of-fact look on his face.

“I’ve lived here my whole life, and I have seen many junkies. That guy doesn’t look like a junkie.”

“Don’t judge a crackhead by their cover.”

I couldn’t think of an answer that didn’t involve provoking a junkie or disturbing a monk. So, the only sane way for those two to proceed was an argument. The climate conditions were perfect, the lights were flickering, the subway smelled like a locker room, and most importantly, our combatants were ready.

“There is a large community of Buddhist monks in Manhattan. This man could easily be a part of the community. How can you even think he’s a crackhead?”

“You seem like a nice if slightly dim kid. That man right there is a crackhead.”

And the first strikes have been dished. The young one threw an information-based jab, the older man responded with an ad hominem jackhammer—advantage man in the slacks.

“He has 100 dollar sneakers on. Where does a junkie find those kinda shoes?”

A quick sucker punch by the graphic tee, his awareness of branded shoes has finally come in hand. How will the older man recover? Our older man cannot stay reclined. He leans in, ready to fight back.

“Don’t monks stay off the branded stuff? Crackheads steal stuff all the time. Trust me, I have lived way longer than you have. You don’t know half the stuff I do. I lived in New York during the seventies. Even your parents weren’t born. That was the real New York, not what you young ones have made it. The people were honest, and they had a real thing to them. We weren’t weak like you all. The city toughened us; there were gangs and drugs everywhere. Alphabet city wasn’t ‘trendy.’ It had Avenue Death. Those were the times, the things we used to see.”

If you want to read more please email me at vm1582@nyu.edu. Thank you!