

The cult of Kurt Russell

The cult of Kurt Russell remained popular in the twenty-seventh year of the Long Summer. Citizens of Flat Earth continued to sport bald heads and linty eyebrows except for a growing number of boys and girls. Rebellious Mark in his glued-on beard and shaggy hairpiece had thrown on his winter coat and exited the apartment into perfectly regulated sunshine. He didn't leave a note for mother. He travelled by bus to meet his friend Mark at the Grand Hall and together they headed out to Retro-Cantina in their big coats. Mark told Mark of their mutual friend, Kurt Russell — another Mark — who too had a big beard and looked like Kurt Russell in the old mediamoviecolorfilm *The Thing*. He would be joining them later at the seminar. Beneath their beards the boys were cool, like Kurt Russell.

The fashion was to appear to be stranded in Antarctica in sub-zero conditions, face and beard icy like a dead man. Mark had kitted-out his own beard with diamonds that sparkled like crystal snowflakes. Soon they had arrived at the multiwalk and joined the small parade of Kurt Russells; identimatch beards, shaggy hair and heavy coats. Nothing in law prevented kids from faux-freezing on the multiwalk.

Having arrived at Retro-Cantina the two Marks found a table by the plasma-window. Mark didn't understand the seminars. Sure, he looked like Kurt Russell like the best of them, but he wasn't into the lectures and all the clever stuff that went with it. He didn't care for the Kurt Russellettes either. At the mention of Kurt Russellettes the plasma-window snapped out of its placid state, a rain forest, to the Kurt Russellettes, the all-girl dance troupe, dancing in formation as Kurt Russell with beards. Their moves were lively.

Mark frowned. "That's exactly what I'm talking about!" he said. He ordered the plasma-window to return to passive-state rainforest.

The other Mark sniffed. He wished the waiter-personnel would hurry up.

"I like the old mediamoviecolorfilms," continued Mark. "I like that there are no females in that particular old mediamoviecolorfilm. I find it good." He gave a précis of the plot of *The Thing*, unnecessary because all Kurt Russells were familiar with it: an alien life-form lands in the Antarctica of Old Earth and can mimic anyone or anything.

"No one can be trusted," reiterated Mark. "No distractions for the men trapped in Antarctica."

Mark looked at Mark. Mark's beard diamonds sparkled but otherwise he remained silent.

"There's none of the stuff in that mediamoviecolorfilm to create an interpersonal feud among the sexes," Mark continued. "There's only paranoia among men that a monster from outer space is among them, ugly-killing them."

There was logic to the argument and Mark made a sound to suggest he understood. "So, what you're saying is that it's a feminist mediamoviecolorfilm, because there are no females in it?"

Mark slapped the table. He couldn't have put it better. "Feminist mediamoviecolorfilm. That's exactly what I'm about talking."

As most antiquated concepts, the battle of the sexes was best remembered in the vaults of the Grand Hall. Such concepts had no currency in the Long Summer, everything being inexactly equal. The plasma-window at that moment fizzled and the rainforest, distorted by static, disappeared with a perfect pop. A trace of burnt filaments wafted through the room. Defaulted to its factory settings, the plasma-window was suddenly clear and

the raw city beyond came into view. The city was fried rooftops that spread far across Old Earth.

The Marks turned away from the view while a member of plasma-personnel, having arrived in an instant, fixed it. The plasma-window bounced back to life with a tractor in a buttercup field. Mark asked for Kurt Russell and the tractor and field became Kurt Russell in *The Thing*. Mark stroked the diamonds of his beard, watching scenes that he had seen many times before.

The waiter-personnel sported a pink cardigan. It hovered at the table and said, "Hi, fellows. How are we today, fellows?"

The two Marks responded in a brave facsimile of teenage cool, circa 2022.

"Yeah, weather," said Mark.

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The waiter-personnel agreed. In its hands was a tray with beakers of juice and a roundbiscuit each. Mark groaned because he liked it more when the order was not predetermined. He liked it when he could ask for greasyweatherburgerfries in bourbon flavor. Before placing the tray on the table, the waiter-personnel presented its domesticon, five times larger than it needed to be. There was the matter of terms and conditions. The domesticon morphed from a nice smile into a long description of possible side effects.

Mark's lips moved as he began to read. The domesticon would know if he skipped bits.

Like all biscuits your biscuit can cause side effects, although not everyone gets them. You can reduce the chances of experiencing side effects by eating only one biscuit in a 48 unit period. Side effects may be more serious in younger consumers. If

you experience any of the following serious effects STOP taking the biscuit immediately and contact your waiter-personnel.

The word STOP flashed in retinal mode.

The sensation of eating solids: Symptoms could include severe abdominal pain, as delineated in the chart below, and vomiting. Blood in the faeces, passing bad stools — this is normal. Blurred vision or death — this is normal.

A second page excluded Retro-Cantina from all liability. The domesticon returned to happy smile state with a verbal proclamation, ultrafast. Thus the formalities were concluded.

“Very good, fellows,” said the waiter-personnel. “Enjoy your juice and roundbiscuit, fellows.” Only then was the tray placed on the table.

Mark and Mark nibbled their roundbiscuits.

“Russell,” said Mark to Mark, approving the taste sensation.

“Very Russell,” nodded Mark in agreement, his diamond snowflakes shining.

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