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Kevin O'Hara: Phantom of the Moviehouse

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By Kevin O'Hara

PITTSFIELD — To escape the beastly heat of August, I treated myself to a matinee at one of our local cinemas. I'm ashamed to say it had been a while since I last went to the movies, so was surprised to learn that you now choose your seat by touchscreen at the ticket counter before entering the theater. After studying the finger-smudged screen, I selected D6, a choice seat in the middle of the house.

But when I entered the dark theater and took my seat, I found I had made a grievous mistake. The woman on my right must have used a Super Soaker to douse herself with lilac perfume — the strong fragrance shot up into my sinuses like poison darts. To my left sat a rotund fellow munching noisily on a tub of popcorn that could feed a family of four for a week. Not wishing to offend, but also knowing it would be impossible for me to watch "Mission Impossible" without "Fallout," I pretended I was sitting in the wrong seat, and vacated the premises to seek higher ground.

A BATTLE ENSUES

I settled for F1, an aisle seat safely upwind from the floral bombshell and the teething human hamster. No sooner had I figured out how to drop my "stadium" chair into a reclining position, when an elderly couple loomed over me like angry gargoyles. "You're sitting in my seat," the woman seethed, spotlighting her ticket stub — F1 — with the blinding light from her cell phone. By the time I was able to eject from my leather cockpit, F1's husband was motioning her to join him three rows down — C1 and C2 — evidently finding those seats more favorable.

When the house lights dimmed and the audience settled in to enjoy Tom Cruise's latest blockbuster, a tardy pair entered the premises and searched the blackness like clumsy thieves. I held my breath as they passed down the outer aisle, "Oh, please," I muttered, "not Seats C1 and C2!"

Sure enough, the laggard couple stalled above the stone-faced gargoyles, and asked them firmly to vacate their selected seats. Well, wouldn't you know, didn't Mrs. F1 cop an attitude and refused to budge. Their ensuing tirade brought on a slew of unsavory catcalls from the audience. Even the munching hamster spat out a few indigestible kernels.

Fortunately, the tardy pair finally caved in, and shuffled into Seats C3 and C4, despite the proximity of their displaced but pigheaded neighbors. Of course, all this commotion left me squirming guiltily in my stolen seat, knowing that I was the sole perpetrator who had sparked this firestorm.

CHEEZ IT, THE COPS

But no sooner had things seemed to settle down amongst the warring factions, than C3 sprang from her chair and steamed up the aisle. I thought she was off to concessions to buy a 64-ounce Coke that she could slurp happily into the ears of her neighboring squatters. Instead, she returned with the house manager who, like a no-nonsense train conductor, politely asked the interlopers sitting in C1 and C2 to produce their ticket stubs.

Knowing that my goose would soon be rotisserized, I slid stealthily from my seat and slithered up into the darkest and deepest recess of H-row. There I curled into my cushiony chair, chin low, collar high, figuring to escape the beam of pursuing flashlights. Meanwhile, the livid gargoyles were ushered back to their proper seats of F1 and F2, while the rightful heirs of C1 and C2 — raising their arms in victory to the applause of the audience — finally claimed their proper thrones.

At the movie's conclusion, after our invincible hero, Ethan Hunt, had saved our suffering planet from a plutonium holocaust, I hightailed it toward the exit before the closing credits were rolled, fearing that Mrs. F1 — still broiling from her forced game of Musical Chairs — might spot the responsible rogue phantom in the lobby, and beat the living tar out of him.

Kevin O'Hara is a longtime Eagle contributor. Visit his website at thedonkeyman.com.

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