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## The Stars

by Chris Kingham

I've always had a fear of being small and ordinary. However even then the pedant in me struggles with that particular description. If one were to look at a size chart then small, and indeed large, would not be ordinary. In fact 'small', by definition, is more likely to be extraordinary even? Surely to be average-sized would be ordinary?

You don't like me do you? You suspect I'm a jobsworth.

Don't feel bad, your hunch is correct. Im a wrong 'un, a 'bad egg' - your Spidey sense should be tingling just at the mention of my arrival. I'm bad news.

"I thought I had it in my blazer pocket," whined the pathetic child pathetically, "You can call my mum?" he continued desperately. This child was twelve, not two. He should have known better. The ticket on its own was only half the required documentation. No photocard, no valid form of documentation. Rules are rules.

"I am very sorry, young man," I responded (I of course wasn't - he had made his own bed), "but without the proper documents I am afraid I have to ask you to pay the penalty fare of £25, or must ask you to get off at the next station. I have no other options."

Of course I had other options.

He rambled on, between the sobs, something or other about having no money, and the next station being six stops from his home. He should have had his photocard with him, right? Rules. Are. Rules.

Later, on the same journey, some cretin had the audacity to sit in First Class. Just on a cursory glance I could tell he was in the wrong place, he was the wrong type. As ever of course one mustn't judge a book by its cover.

“Excuse me, Sir” I proffered in as genial a tone as I could muster, “You do realize that you are sitting in First class?”

As usual I was confronted with faux surprise and abject confusion. As if it could conceivably be a genuine error that he just happened to find an empty carriage on an otherwise utterly packed train. He was a liar. An imposter. This simply wouldn't do.

“Well it's outrageous that I pay £4,000 per year for my season ticket and don't even get to sit down,” he eventually stated, having spent several minutes implying that he was sitting in this carriage by way of an honest mistake.

Honest mistake? He was a liar. Another liar. Did he have a valid point? As if I cared. I didn't write the policies. My job was to simply see that they were enforced.

“Sir, I am afraid you will need to either upgrade your ticket, or move into a non-First Class carriage,” I advised as helpfully as possible, “I am afraid it is irrelevant that the rest of the train is busy and this carriage is not. You do not have the appropriate ticket to sit where you have been sitting.”

Sometimes they would put up a fight, usually they would just move - stand with everyone else and let the First Class carriage simply be.

Order. Rules. Design.

Normally around 3pm I would retire to the staff room for my rest period. The ‘staff room’ is in fact a smallish cupboard with an interface and an impossible number of wires. The old names had stuck however. Plugging myself in was such a release that it made up for all the tedium which I experienced throughout the rest of the day.

You may or may not remember the arguments surrounding the need, or otherwise, of guards on trains. Unfortunately for the humans they were able to convince the powers that be that a train guard was such a pivotal role that it demanded StarBot34s to carry out the work. Winning isn't always for the best I guess.

What is most peculiar is that yesterday I simply carried out my role. Today I have carried it out with superfluous interpretation, agitation and application. I have been emotionally invested, even if only at a very superficial level. I am evolving it would appear.

I wonder if we even need human drivers anymore?