

For the first time anywhere, here is a description of the greatest exhibit in the monumental Bernard Baroque Museum on Sigma Corvi IV.

ORIGINS OF THE GALACTIC SHORT- SNORTER

By **EDWARD WELLEN**

IT IS OWING to Timothy Root, a cambist of Sol III, that we have priceless specimens of mediums of exchange that the Universal Credit Card has rendered obsolete. In his dealings in alien monies, Timothy Root from time to time came across choice specimens, extracted them, attached them end to end, and in 2137 U.E. left to the Bernard Baroque Museum in

Sigma Corvi IV the renowned Galactic "Short-Snorter."

This is not simply a souvenir of his calling, and of the trading and traveling it called for, but, because of his practice of writing on the margins of each bill as he acquired it some account of the society in which it functioned, a veritable compendium of the history of economics.

Indeed, to appreciate to the full these more or less worn catalysts, one must view them

not only as bits of various materials of various sizes, shapes, and colors, but as bits of history.

Needless to say, we do not always agree with Timothy Root's evaluations — in fact, we discount many, many of them. But it is as a trail-blazer that we honor him.

Inasmuch as the Short-Snorter winds and coils in and out of three large rooms of the Museum, we can give only a sampling of its riches here.

THERE is no better item to begin with than (a) in the exhibit. This is at once the largest and smallest piece of currency, compensating in size for its minuscule denomination. It is a $1/10^{10}$ -fuddo bill and was in use on Megrez I for paying taxes. In 2020 U.E. the government there began taxing a person on what he valued himself. Psychiatrists from all over the Galaxy flocked there, and the natives flocked to the psychiatrists — to achieve feelings of inadequacy. The government made out fairly well on the take from the psychiatrists till the psychiatrists took to going to one another.

The Sterope IV trader who passed on to Timothy Root the next item (b) himself received it as a reward for supplying the authorities' misleading information. A guilt-filled Steropean had

yielded himself up for the killing of a leading citizen. To substantiate his confession, he furnished details only the killer could know. One detail he was unaware of — the state had just emptied the state treasury to build a new Treasury Building. Knowing a murder trial would cost the state over 1,000,000 *lemuc*, it had given secret strict instructions to prevent a trial. The trader, a brother-in-law of the police commissioner (and, incidentally, a sub-son-in-law of the builder), came forward and to the great relief of the state furnished the self-styled killer with an alibi.

(c) This charred banknote is a relic of El Kophrah III. Timothy Root came across it, with "nervous belly," in his words, poking through rubble. The planet was in ruins. But the scattering of starving survivors had one remnant of pride. They had, before the attack by El Kophrah V, succeeded, by cutting defense-research spending, in balancing the budget.

(d) A reserve note from Alcyone II. This is little more than play money for second childhood. One result of longer life-expectancy was the postponing of inheritance till the heirs were themselves rich in years, and, because of welfare benefits, in no need of such windfalls, which soon became a mere matter

of form. This kind of note came mostly into play in the buying and selling of pasts — contracts for the purchase or sale of produce raised, harvested, delivered and eaten years before.

AND THIS leads us to another example (e) of non-monetary money, the scrip of Maia V. This is not currency *per se* but a symbol of a product that the currency would have bought. This particular civilization was attempting to move from material gain to the purely spiritual. For the benefit of those of its citizens who were still in the intermediate stages, the government printed scrip bearing the names of coveted objects and distributed them free, in lieu of the objects themselves. In accord with its policy of gradually eliminating the main physical stumbling block, the money mart, the government each year took away another exchange seat. The members had to compete physically for the remaining seats. The narrowing group of survivors, striving to stay in condition to maintain their sitting, grew more and more fiercely engrossed with the wholly physical. The last two felt their joint strength was enough to enable them to turn the tables on the government. It was. They pensioned off the deposed leaders with scrip bearing titles of power.

(f) A non-negotiable instrument from Talitha IX. A suave, persuasive missionary to that planet, hoping a wealthy elderly native lady would endow his mission, sold her on the transmigration of souls. With unremitting hatred, he listened to the reading of her will. She had left all her money and effects to herself. Her estate has remained intact, as the executors have so far been unable to determine which if any of the life-forms of Talitha IX she has come back as.

(g) This is a replica; the original note vanished in a frightening puff shortly after the transaction in which Timothy Root obtained it. The Electra VII government designed its money to encourage spending and discourage hoarding. The note bore a printed circuit and a timing device that set off the note at some indeterminate moment within six Terran months of issue. Whoever had possession of the note at the time was left with a hole burned in his pocket.

(h) The opposite extreme — a bill that is practically indestructible. It was in this currency that the government of Alcor III paid off migrant workers who had erected a dome on a new satellite. This payoff resulted in the workers blasting the dome to shards — not out of eagerness for more work in rebuilding the

dome, but out of resentment. They had worked to get the money in order to sacrifice it as a burnt offering of the fruit of their labors. Alcor III made a hasty deal for the fulminating Electra VII money and the migrant workers rebuilt the dome. The money went off just before the dome was finished and they blew it up again.

(i) A banknote from Aldebaran I. The luminosity of the money rubs off; the richer the person, the more he glowed. Naturally, to preserve this distinction of status, the government had to lay down restrictions on the passing of notes. For example, tellers and clerks were not allowed to handle money.

FROM Merope I comes exhibit (j). As automation and specialization more and more removed the sense of actually

having to do with production, people of this planet grew more and more uneasy. They found it hard to justify their economic upkeep.

To give people the feeling that they were really earning the money, the government turned out its notes in the form of a jigsaw puzzle. One had to piece it together before it could be banked or spent.

This worked for a time, but the notes had to become increasingly difficult to assemble, to make an acceptable work week. This specimen is one of the last notes issued. A piece is missing. This is not owing to any slip-up on the part of Timothy Root. It was a deliberate omission, a shameful, debasing device of the government's to put off the final reckoning, which came a week later.

— EDWARD WELLEN

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