

Pretending to be a person.

“YOU DON’T mean shit to me. I know your type and I know where you come from. Stay out of my way, stay in your section, and push the Stroh’s. That’s it.”

So commanded the king of the vendors at Detroit’s Joe Louis Arena, and that honest simplicity suited Codell just fine. His boss was so full of himself and so far above Codell that friction between them was impossible - as long as Codell sold his beer, kept his mouth shut and stayed out of his boss’s face.

Codell executed those three things to perfection. In February, 1980, the National Hockey League All-Star game drew a record 21,002, and Codell felt like he sold beer to half of them. His boss showed his approval by ignoring him. With each trip Codell made to the storeroom, his boss had some smart-ass thing to say as if Codell wasn’t there at all. “I’d do anything for this fuckin’ place,” said his boss, “as long as it don’t go over my shift.”

On March 2, a guzzling crowd packed the Joe to watch Detroit’s own undefeated Thomas Hearn, AKA The Hitman AKA the Motor City Cobra, punish Ángel Espada for four rounds with his left, the way his left punished everyone. Codell broke a sales record that night. What his boss had to say was, “Those front-office bean-counters want a inventory? Hell, I made up the last one.”

It went that way all year. Codell and his boss wordlessly passed each other in the corridors. HR wanted everyone to have sensitivity training, and the king of vendors almost seemed to slightly turn his head to Codell and came near to intensifying an

expression that, if he would've prolonged it, could have been an acknowledgement that Codell was a person. "HR is clueless," the boss said. "Who needs 'training.' Those clowns wrote the book of stupid."

On August 2, Hearns fought at the Joe for the world welter-weight title. Pipino Cuevas lasted all of two rounds. By the time the ref stopped the fight, Codell had hawked a few hundred brewskis. "Lazy spic shoulda stayed in Mexico," said the head honcho. "Up here, people actually have to do things."

Hearns didn't have another fight at the Joe until December. For the first time since Codell was hired, he talked to his boss.

"I'm not working Hearns-Primera," Codell told him.

"Yes you are."

"No, I'm not. I'm gonna go work at Cobo Hall. They got more goin' on. Some big rock shows comin' up."

"You tellin' me you quittin'?"

"Just for now."

"Like hell, 'just for now.' Go ahead, go to Cobo and don't come back. Go back to where you came from. Make the Joe a better place."

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On December 6, Hearns KO'd Venezuela's Luis Primera in the sixth round. Beverage sales at the Joe were down a little. After his shift, Codell's boss, the king of vendors, headed for a cold one at the Lindell A.C. It was THE place to spot Detroit's

pro athletes. That night, the Lions' Alex Karas was there and so was the Tigers' Norm Cash. The place buzzed in the afterglow of Hearn's knock-out. The line at the bar was four deep. The king of vendors pushed his way to the front. "Gimme a beer!" he commanded.

The bartender knew the type and knew where he came from. "Get the hell to the back of the line," he said to the pretender. "You don't mean shit to me."

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