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Oy, It's Super Yenta, Or Kvetch Me If You Can

by Marleen S. Barr

Blog Preamble

Look up in the sky. Is it a tweet? Is it a blimp? (No, I've been on a diet!) It's Super Yenta. Super Yenta is a strange visitor from the Planet of the Yentas (locally known as Plotz) who has powers and abilities far beyond those of normal yentas. Feminist science fiction scholar Sondra Lear (the secret identity of Super Yenta) fights for truth, justice, and the American way.

Origin Story

So here I am starting this blog and I immediately encounter tsuris. The instructions say that the tags should be simple words that everyone can understand. But this mandate is not applicable to my blog. I am not going to talk about things which can be described by simple tags. This blog will be replete with tales of tsuris, sodden with kvetching, and routinely sprinkled with oy up the wazoo. How can I tell the truth without using "tsuris," "kvetching," and "oy" as tags? I mean my husband Pepe Le Pew (he's a goy) saw my subtitle. I asked him if he knew what "kvetching" meant. He said "no" and indicated that he didn't want to find out. So, if Pepe doesn't want to know from what I am talking about, how can I even hope to interest strange goyim?

I'll worry about this communication problem in future posts. For the moment, here is a revelation: Professor Sondra Lear mild mannered (okay this is pushing it) feminist science fiction scholar is my secret identity. I am in truth an emissary from the Planet of the Yentas (known to locals as Plotz) which is located in the same solar system as

Krypton. Hence, this makes me a card carrying Plotzian, not an Earthling. In short, I am a super hero—a.k.a. Super Yenta. I can do stuff like snoop with my x-ray vision and fly toward prime gossip sites faster than a speeding bullet. Up until this moment, I have done all that I could to hide the truth. I grew up in Forest Hills, Queens, the yenta capital of the world. I tried not to stand out in a community which was so yenta sodden that even Super Yenta would fit in. I thought that my secret identity was perfect. I mean who would notice that I am Super Yenta if I presented myself as a professional feminist separatist planet scholar who was obsessed with husband hunting? The secret identity ploy is no longer working. Other feminist science fiction scholars have followed in my wake. I finally got married. (Okay, this happened when I really was three hundred and twenty years old according to my lengthy Plotzian life span. But who is counting?) My once exotic science fiction life has become mundane. Well, there is nothing to do at this point but tell the simple truth: Super Yenta, c'est moi! Or: Oy, It's Super Yenta.

Why Jewish Super Heroes Need Jewish Doctors

Or, How Joan Rivers Became an Posthumous Honorary Plotzian

Oy, I'm sick!

I thought it was impossible for me to become ill on Earth. After all, as a Plotzian, I am immune to terrestrial bacteria and viruses. I can't catch swine flu; we don't have pigs on Plotz. Plotzians, Jewish feminist utopians, don't think it's kosher to eat meat. Our main food source comes from harvesting vegetarian sushi which grows wild (in both brown rice and white rice varieties) on our sushi trees.

This is not to say that Plotzians never closely encounter pigs. The denizens of Prick, our nemesis planet, are quite male chauvinist pig-like. I have been warned that "prickite"—which comes in red, green, and gold varieties—is the only thing that can harm me on Earth. My literary scholar secret identity leads me to question exactly what "prickite" means. Is it animal, vegetable, or mineral? More specifically, is it geological

in terms of being a rock fragment emanating from the planet Prick—something analogous to Kryptonite or unobtainium? Or does it mean a denizen of the planet Prick? I am partial to the later definition. Prickites have much in common with Woody Allen's personified sperm (in "Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex . . .") and the sentient breast protagonist of Philip Roth's "The Breast." To describe Prickites in the vein of Roth and Allen, it is necessary simply to state that these male beings are sentient penises which come [sic] in red, green, and gold diverse racial hues. Am I ill because I came in close proximity to a Prickite meteor in the Hayden Planetarium? Or, could I have been laid low after closely encountering a big green penis strolling down Madison Avenue? I guess not. Even in the age of Obama, an invasion of multiethnic sentient extraterrestrial penises would attract attention in Manhattan.

I called Dr. Mary Catherine Murphy-McCarthy, my in network primary care physician. "Hello. Doctor, the room is spinning around. I can't move. Am I dying?"

"I can't definitely tell you that you are not dying. Your symptoms might be signs of a stroke. Go to the hospital immediately," ordered Dr. Murphy-McCarthy.

I could really be dying. This possibility is off the oy mode scale. I can't go to a hospital. The doctors would immediately discern that I am not human. Even a simple flu shot would blow my secret identity; the needle could not penetrate my skin. But interplanetary breach of cultural codes aside, Dr. Murphy-McCarthy did not understand me. When a New York Jewish woman says that she is dying—as in "oy, ya can die from it" in reference to every day tribulations—she is not talking about real death. "Dying from it" is New York Jewish women's incessant and trivial state of being—and Gentiles don't understand this point.

Hoping that I was only "dying" in the Jewish female sense which does not necessitate immediate hospitalization, I turned on the television. Joan Rivers was telling Larry King about how she was prevented from leaving Costa Rica because her passport said "Joan Rosenberg."

“Larry, I told the Costa Rican airline desk clerk that I was having a heart attack. And do you know what she did? She had the audacity to call the paramedics,” said Rivers.

Oy, even though I am from another planet, I could immediately discern what the Costa Rican clerk could not comprehend. Joan was not literally having a heart attack. She was not dying; she was plotzing! No wonder she vociferously insisted to Larry that the Costa Rican airline personnel were pricks. Vis-à-vis Gentile New York doctors and Costa Rican airline employees, Jewish female language is no lingua franca. Joan Rivers, who exemplified Jewish female plotz mode on national television, deserves to be an honorary Plotzian.

To do list:

1) communicate my suggestion re honoring Joan Rivers to the Plotzian Maternal Council

2) tell Dr. Murphy-McCarthy that I am not dead

3) rest in bed and drink plenty of fluids—regardless of whether or not either potential definition of “prickite” is the cause of my illness

The Alien Upstairs

I love Pamela Sargent’s work in particular and her *The Alien Upstairs* in general. I have fond memories of writing about this novel when I was first formulating my secret identity as Sondra Lear feminist science fiction scholar. But I never imagined that Sargent’s text would become real for me regarding the Manhattan co-op building I call home. The place is replete with aliens; there is one upstairs—and I would go so far as to say some live on every floor. We’re talkin’ here REAL aliens, extraterrestrials! I mean, as you are aware, I am a Plotzian and it takes one to know one.

Many of my fellow shareholders are just not normal. Since the time when I first moved in, I have only seen doormen and the Super. The alien neighbors are not yet clued into the fact that humans do stuff like venture out to go food shopping (or at least they use Fresh Direct). As Super Yenta, I know from everything going on in here and I am sure that some residents have not left their apartments in years. I think that pets are not allowed in the building because maybe dogs can differentiate between humans and nonhumans.

One neighbor in particular (one of the few who does leave her apartment) acted as a Rosetta Stone who unlocked the entire alien within scenario. Every day she goes to the Republican Club and wears red plaid pants. During my time in America, New York, Earth, I have accepted the fact that some humans (even New York City humans) are Republicans. But what human woman who is (to put it nicely) very corpulent would wear red plaid pants? Red plaid pants are definitely a plus size fashion choice which defies human credulity. This woman's sartorial taste is proof positive that she hails from another planet.

So Pepe and I named her Pantaloons Rouges. I often use my x-ray vision to look through the apartment door and inform Pepe that "Pantaloons Rouges is taking out the garbage." As a Plotzian, I naturally spend most of my waking hours plotzing. But I am plotzing especially big time from Pantaloons Rouges.

Plotzians are peaceful. I use my powers as Super Yenta for good. But my fellow extraterrestrial neighbors are definitely not from Plotz (especially since Plotz is a feminist separatist planet). OMG, what if they are from Prick? Plotz has been at war with Prick for centuries. I know; I should not assume this difficulty exists sans evidence. And I just hope that the Prickites do not have super powers like mine. If they do, the situation is beyond oy. (And I don't often proclaim that something is beyond oy.)

I can just imagine an extraterrestrial real estate agent marketing this building: ("Location. Location. Location. Just think of the possibilities of living directly under the Empire State Building. You could use the antenna to communicate with The Big Giant Head.") This is not impossible. Joan Rivers told Larry King on national television

that her Manhattan apartment was really haunted. She said that it was cold and dogs would not venture within. She added that she employed a ghost buster who successfully de-ghosted her apartment. Oy, I am an extraterrestrial who believes that I am living with other extraterrestrials. Who am I gonna call? Joan is Jewish; I am Jewish. Do goyim have these problems?

Oh, I know who to call: the Plotzian Maternal Council. To cope with the aliens living upstairs and throughout the building, I require the advice of super powered Jewish mothers. Feminist science fiction can save the day.

The Sisterhood of the Traveling Red (Kryptonite) Pants

A rare event: someone was in the hall outside my apartment. I slanted my eyes and turned on my x-ray vision to discern what was ensuing. As I stared straight through the door, I clearly saw that Pantaloons Rouges was, as usual, wearing her red plaid pants and waiting for the elevator. Just as I was surmising that she was on her way to have lunch at the Republican Club, my vision began to cloud. I could no longer see through the door like a normal super hero. My x-ray vision super power had failed for the first time. What would become of me? Would I be reduced to looking through the peep hole like a non-super yenta?

Luckily, once Pantaloons Rouges was ensconced within the elevator, my x-ray vision was again operative. What caused the malfunction? There was one possible reason: Pantaloons Rouges' red pants were impacting upon me in the manner of red Kryptonite zapping Superman's powers. My life would be threatened if I did not remove Pantaloons Rouges' red pants from my proximity.

Since it was impossible for me to vanquish the red pants myself, I had to ask Pepe for help. This would be no easy matter. Pepe, after all, has no idea that I am Super Yenta. He has enough trouble being married to someone who he believes to be a garden variety yenta.

“Your mission is to help me to break into Pantaloons Rouges’ apartment and abscond with her red pants,” I insisted.

“Non. Jamais. This agenda would go against my heritage as a proud French Canadian descendant of Samuel de Champlain and his mighty effort to discover the Bay de Chaleur. And don’t even think of asking me to channel my inner Scaramouche via challenging Pantaloons Rouge’s husband to a duel. The duel will never happen. She would say that dueling in the vestibule goes against “The House Rules.” “No umbrellas allowed in the vestibule. Ditto for swords.”

I was desperate to the extent that I was forced to do something nonkosher.

“If you help me I will take us out for a shrimp dinner,” I offered.

“Okay.”

Onward to making sure that Pantaloons Rouges goes outside while her red pants remain inside. No problem. I merely sent her a notice stating that George W. Bush was going to be a guest speaker at the Republican Club and formal attire was required for admittance.

Pantaloons Rouge, attired in a red gown which bore no relation to red Kryptonite, had no impact on my super powers. When I looked through the door and saw the elevator closing with her inside, I knew it was time to strike. With Pepe in tow, I surreptitiously used super force to open her apartment door.

“Quick, Look through Pantaloons Rouges’ closets, find the red plaid pants, and put them in this aluminum coated freezer bag. Good. Mission accomplished.”

Even though the aluminum coating protected me from the red plaid pants’ red Kryptonite-esque characteristics, I could not risk keeping them in my apartment. What to do? Well, since they really could look good on a slender woman, I decided to donate them to my clothes swap group. The pants could live happily ever after being passed along at different swaps. I felt a great sense of satisfaction as I watched one thin swap

sister open the aluminum bag and decide to make the red plaid pants her own. And then she said something that could have meant that I was in big trouble.

"Everyone look. Look what I found at the bottom of this clothes pile. It is Super Yenta's super hero costume. I have discovered the secret identity of Super Yenta. She must be here in this room. Super Yenta is a fellow clothes swapper."

"The Super Yenta outfit is merely a Halloween costume. By the way, does anyone have any stuff that I could use to dress up as Donald Trump?" I said.

After all of this tumult, I was too tired to fly uptown to Trump tower.

Balloon Yenta

I could fly to the latest White House State Dinner. Super heroes are always welcome at these shindigs. But that would be too simple. The biggest challenge is to be invited as a mere mortal feminist science fiction scholar. The entry plan would have to be really good; even science fiction Grand Masters are not invited to State Dinners.

What to do? I had a eureka moment while looking at all the silver Christmas wrapping paper my neighbors discarded. I would not fly to Washington like a normal super hero. No, I would use the silver paper to build a balloon, put myself inside it, and float down the eastern seaboard.

I needed a disguise. I could not be recognized as either Super Yenta or Sondra. If I put on thick black rimmed glasses, no one would guess that I am Super Yenta. And, to hide my Sondra identity, I could borrow some stage makeup from the *Wicked* set and paint myself green.

What to wear? Well, there was that red sari my father brought back from India during World War Two. And just in case the green skin and the glasses did not provide sufficient camouflage, putting a yellow painted mop on my head would be just the thing.

I built the silver balloon. I put on the glasses, red sari, yellow mop, and green paint. I was all set to go. Ten, nine, eight... I blasted off from my apartment's terrace.

Pepe became very concerned as soon as he realized that I was not home and he saw the balloon floating in front of the Empire State Building. "Help. I see a balloon heading south and I think my wife is trapped inside it," he tweeted to a *News 4 New York* anchor.

The entire world spent the day wondering if a purportedly trapped in a balloon feminist science fiction scholar would land safely.

As planned, moi, a little green Jewish super yenta, landed on the White House lawn. I tore open the silver paper and stuck my head through the hole. "Take me to your leader," I said to the White House Social Secretary. (What else could a science fiction scholar say?)

"You are not on the guest list. But your red sari looks really cool and your thick wavy blonde hair is to die for. True, you don't look like a tall thin shiksa. But the green skin is awesome. Barack loves diversity. Welcome," said the Social Secretary.

Mission accomplished. I did not crash land.

Sarah Palin's Manhattan

I flew to the top of the Empire State Building to check in with the Big Giant Bleached Blonde Head who runs the Plotzian Executive Council.

"Emissary to Earth America publicly known as Super Yenta secret identity Sondra Lear," I said to the antenna.

"It is about time that we heard from you. You have called home at last. What's new?"

“Sondra has been married for a decade. So enough already with the ‘what's new’ question.”

“Fair enough. I’ll get down to business. The Council members and I want to know how female politicians get elected in the Earth country America. What can you report?”

“America’s major female politicians are Hillary and Sarah Palin.”

“Are these women alike?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“Hillary acts like a normal intelligent person and Palin . . . well it is just too complicated to explain.”

“There are big time budget cuts on Plotz. We invested a lot to send you to Earth America. We want details about Palin. Report. That’s an order.”

“Okay. Since I am Super Yenta and I have special powers and abilities, I guess I can give this a shot. But I am not sure that you will believe me.”

“I’m the Big Giant Bleached Blonde Head who runs the Plotzian Executive Council. I’m communicating with a flying feminist super hero who is talking to the Empire State Building’s antenna. Shoot.”

“How could you have known that shooting is one of Palin’s favorite activities? She had a reality television show which portrays her running around Alaska killing animals. She shot caribou and bludgeoned big fish to death. I can’t imagine what she is going to kill next. Luckily, I think Palin doesn’t eat cute little sled dog puppies.”

“This Alaskan killing scenario is certainly not cool in terms of the Plotzian feminist ethos. But when in Earth America do as the Earth Americans do. Your next assignment:

act like Palin and run for office. Of course, we expect you to do this via your Sondra Lear secret identity, not as Super Yenta."

"The assignment is impossible. Earth America is a big place. Sondra lives in midtown Manhattan. There is a big difference between midtown Manhattan and the Alaskan tundra—that is if they have "tundra" in Alaska. And if this were not enough, Sondra can't even get elected to her co-op Board. The Board does not like her. But that is a long story. How do you expect Sondra to seek national office—and to achieve success via acting like Sarah Palin? Where do you expect me to find big animals to kill in Manhattan? There are no big animals in Manhattan; we just have rats and roaches. Do you want me to go to the Central Park Zoo and blow away Gus the polar bear? That would be a crime. Ditto for exterminating the co-op Board. I'm Super Yenta. People look up to me when I fly around. I can't do something criminal. I would not even agree to murdering the English language like Palin does—much less to shooting animals."

"You have your orders. Carry them out. I have spoken. If you don't follow orders, we will make you come home. You will have to leave your husband. You will then have to start all over again as a single woman. You will have to find a husband on a feminist separatist planet. End of transmission."

Aaaargh. O.M.G. This is intolerable. Pepe is very nice. I would miss him. Having to husband hunt on a feminist separatist planet would be worse than being exiled to Wasilla. It would be worse than having to deal with my co-op Board. I'll just fly back home and think of something.

I have spent an entire day thinking and I can't come up with anything. I guess I will just escape by burying my head in the *New York Times* travel section. This article on Madagascar looks interesting. Here is a quote that could save the day: The island of "Madagascar is host to some of the rarest and most unusual flora and fauna in the world. There are hissing cockroaches, giant jumping rats…along with various kinds of lemurs… A team of researchers announced that they had found a new species of carnivore lurking on one of Madagascar's lakes."

Eureka! I'm saved. I don't have to leave my husband and husband hunt on Plotz. Madagascar is an island; Manhattan is an island. That's close enough! Cockroaches and rats can be interesting. It is now possible for me to act just like Palin. I can run around killing rats and roaches! I can even resort to discovering a new alligator species lurking in one of Manhattan's sewers.

My new reality show called "Sarah Palin's Manhattan" was born. I am seeking political office via using my show as a platform. I don a safari suit replete with pith helmet and—armed with gun and compass—bash the hell out of roaches and rats. (The co-op Board members, who were initially upset to see me toting my pith helmet, gun, and compass, were ultimately happy to save on the building's extermination bill.)

"Is this true?" asked Big Giant Bleached Blonde Head?

"You betcha."

The Plane, The Plane

Yentahood coincides well with doing an excellent job as a super hero. It is really good for me to know everything that is going on in the world. For example, I was on the scene immediately after hearing a fire cracker explode on an international flight. I peered inside the fuselage and saw that the passengers and crew had everything under control. That's what I like about Earth people: even though they lack super human powers and abilities, they are often capable of being super heroes.

Detroit—and every other American city—we have a problem. People are literally chafing under the airlines' new flight restrictions. There is talk about rebelling against the "sit in your seat during the last hour of the flight rule." The proposed tactic: asking everyone to urinate simultaneously. We have had Tea Party demonstrations. Are pee parties next?

I can’t protect every plane against this new technological threat. Even a super powered extraterrestrial yenta can only be in one place at a time. What to do? Well, I could generate more of myself. Plotzians mastered cloning eons ago. And I could always go the borrowing more of me from parallel universes route. But these are not good ideas. I don’t think that America is ready for an army of super powered yentas patrolling the skies. One of me is enough already for them.

America, a Puritanical country, is also not ready for scanning devices which makes passengers’ genitals available for the world to see. The only logical solution—requiring that everyone fly naked—is not an option. Many of my adopted fellow citizens would define the Full Monty as a fate worse than potential death. I mean bare is definitely not the way to go for Americans—people who cannot even cope with saying the word “toilet” in public. And streaking is so twentieth century.

Logic cannot save the day. Not to worry. I am not a Vulcan! As a proud Plotzian, a daughter of the planet of the yentas, it is obvious to me that there is only one way to go. (We’re not talkin’ peeing here.) I had to get on the phone and gab with an empowered woman.

Who am I gonna call? Former Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano. She is a fellow ethnic Baby Boomer native born New Yorker. I could certainly “tawk” to her.

“Hi Janet. This is Super Yenta. We gotta tawk. Do ya got a minute? Good. I will be right there.”

I flew to her location in exactly sixty seconds.

“Janet we gotta put our heads together. More patriarchal technology won’t work. We gotta think outside the military industrial complex box.”

“Fine. What do you suggest, Super Yenta?”

“We haveta think female. Think like the Elle Woods character in *Legally Blonde*. She won the day by solving her problem in terms of fashion and female intuition. We must do the same.”

“I’m all ears.”

“No, no. We’re not talkin’ Vulcan male logic here. Naked Americans absolutely will not fly. So the question is—what can they wear? My answer: they should dress like me. All plane passengers can be required to don super hero costumes sans underwear. I certainly know that it is impossible to hide anything in a skin tight lycra super hero suit sans underwear! The flying “Underpants Bomber” will go the way of the dodo bird. I can attest to the fact that super hero costumes are very comfortable for flying. Kids will love this idea. Adults too. Have you ever attended a science fiction convention masquerade? As a side benefit, this new sartorial requirement might motivate more people to exercise and eat healthfully. To put it gently, zaftig is unforgiving in the face of lycra. Last but not least, the need for all these new clothing items will spur weak retail sales. The schmata district in New Yawk will thank you.”

“I’m sold. I’ll tell Barack immediately. He’ll get on board even though he looks and acts like a Vulcan.”

The President issued an executive order mandating that all passengers on American carriers must change into super hero costumes before boarding. The new law caused the mother of all popular culture clichés to assume a new meaning: “Look up in the sky. . . . It’s super humans.”

Chalk one up for our side.

Blog Conclusion

I think that it is time to quit being Super Yenta while I am ahead. If I continue I can risk unleashing some terrible force on Earth. I could do something like release

Prickites from the Phantom Zone. Prickites could wreak havoc here. I know this because of the damage that the real pricks on the co-op Board cause. No need to risk supernatural pricks being elected to the Board. Adhering to the Prime Directive, I discarded my super hero suit forever. Not to worry. I now have more time to devote to Professor Sondra Lear's mundane pedagogical and scholarly endeavors.