



*What's on your horizon?*

*Morgan*

*Chai*

## “Working Class Crowns of Steel”

It's a somber day marked by the passing of time counted only by the tunes that drift out of my stereo. I sit here quietly and gaze out over the majestic Columbia River and watch as monstrous ocean going ships pass beneath my window, almost as in parade and passing for my review. I watch them, scope them in the lens of my binoculars and make mental notes of their names painted across their bows, and of the flags that wave behind and beneath the exhaust stacks that adorn their working class crowns of steel.

It's not quite what I had in mind for living near the ocean, but at least it's a view I can enjoy. The ships are but a mere break in the ebbing tide of the Columbia, reminding me that there is life abounding in the cities in America and around the world. The Columbia proves it, for it feeds that life, both directions, in and out, east to west, always with ships and barges filled to capacity with precious hidden cargos.

Today, docked across the river beside a pulp plant is the “Iwanuma Maru” and above the name are three glyphs that look either Japanese or Chinese, or of one of those far eastern languages. I cannot see the flag, but it boasts the American flag as well. She's been loaded with shredded timber that once graced the forests of Oregon and Washington. Timber that's destined for the paper and pulp mills of the Orient.

The “Rich Way” has also recently docked, thanks to the help of two bright red Shaver tugs, and docked in line with it rests the “Green Suma.” They will both be taking on a load of shredded wood and wood pulp. Ironically, just 500 feet in front of the ships is an awesome size paper and pulp mill that hungrily devours tons of the same shredded wood. Shredded wood that gets soaked in dangerous, toxic chemicals, then mixed in pulping and mashing machines, only to have the life pressed out of it as it metamorphosizes into planks of corrugated cardboard. From there it's shipped to factories that make multifarious shaped boxes and shipping containers. And from there, sadly into landfills.

A westbound, medium size Shaver tug is pushing four large empty barges to another mill less than a quarter mile from here. Another gigantic mill. Each barge can carry approximately fifteen to twenty semi-truck loads of shredded wood and bark. They too will be loaded to the hilt with shredded wood then tugged upstream under the cover of darkness to the Boise Cascade paper mill. The interesting thing about this particular scene is the name of the tug, the "Western Comet". I wonder, what does the name mean to the tug operator? The "Western Snail" would be more fitting for a tug, now wouldn't it? Oh well, to each his own.

I'm shocked to see tugs pulling timber up the river, too. Hundreds of felled trees have been dumped into the river and lassoed together for one final ride, the ride out of country. I would imagine that it's much cheaper to pull hundreds of trees on the river than to load them on logging trucks. If they had been transported by logging trucks they would be unloaded by gargantuan forklifts fitted with dual vertical pincers that snatch and lift up ten to fifteen logs at a time, then carried to bark stripping machines and shredders.

I look out over the logs that are neatly stacked in long, long, heaping piles, rows upon rows of once tall and mighty trees, and I'm reminded of how we, as a nation, have failed as caretakers of our treasured forests. Our forests are being raped, robbed and pillaged, and it's bad enough that our need for timber products is so pronounced, but we're shipping millions of tons of timber and wood products to other nations as well. America is watching South America's problem of the destruction of the rain forests, and not watching what's being done with our own invaluable timberland.

I think that we're cutting down too many trees, but at least as I watch all that is done with the trees, I realize that we wouldn't be able to survive without them. We get our paper products from them, wood products, heat to make other products, heat for electricity, etc. Without seeing what's done with the timber it's hard to imagine how dependent we are upon these precious and once majestic trees. Yes, I still think we have to come up with alternatives to total dependency on wood products, yet I don't see a tiny bit wasted. Every bit of the tree is used. It doesn't justify ravaging our forests but it does teach us something.

The huge ships arrive empty, their painted water line markers hovering yards above the river's surface, proudly displaying their hungry bellies. The tugs pull hundreds of lassoed floating logs to their sides, nearly stretching the length of the ship and more than thirty feet wide. Then methodically, four cranes up on the deck of the ship go to work, hoisting up to ten to twenty logs per crane load—every five to eight minutes. Dare we do the math?

Rapidly, the logs are hoisted over the deck and lowered into a seemingly endless pit of a hold. All day long the tugs pull logs to the starving steel monsters and within two, sometimes three days the entire cargo hold is full of our timber. But it doesn't end there. The cargo doors are then closed, timber-size steel posts are placed vertically every thirty feet along both sides of the length of the ship and the loading continues on top of the deck. Another day goes by as the steel monster's tentacles devour the floating timber. When it's over the prodigious ship looks like a shallow floating barge heaped with thousands upon thousands of logs.

My spirit cries as steel cables are stretched tight over the resting timber, preparing them for their ocean cruise to foreign mills. In somber silence, the Shaver tugs slowly pull the engorged ship from its moorings, and within minutes the timber-laden monster is on its way west to strange and distant ports of call. None of this would be happening if it wasn't for the mighty Columbia river.

The saddest part of this entire process is knowing that our precious timber is being shipped across the world. Admittedly, America is a wood glutton, but how can we ship our timber out of our country when we need it more? If all Americans' could see what is happening to their precious forests, I truly believe that they would do something about it, but as far as I can figure, it's a very well kept secret. It's a secret I'm ashamed of knowing.

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