

SHELL SHOCKED

The Frommer Endorsement and the Miami Beach Counter Attack

By Art Stevens

An emergency meeting was called for. Each member of the Miami Beach Tourist office was convened for a midnight meeting and every single one of them showed up.

The chairman began: “Ladies and gentlemen, tonight is a make or break meeting for Miami Beach. We have been fighting Sanibel Island tooth and nail for our share of tourist dollars for many years. And we’ve had to take some cutthroat routes to damage Sanibel’s reputation as a major Florida destination. But this new development could take us off the map altogether unless we act with our usual diligence, conscientiousness and deviousness.”

The chairman paused for effect and sipped his third vodka martini.

“It was announced today that Arthur Frommer, that aging tourist prophet, has ranked Sanibel number one as his favorite place in the world to travel. What could he have been thinking? We all know that one week in Miami Beach is worth six months in Sanibel.

“Frommer is a major influence in how tourists spend their dollars and his endorsement of Sanibel is a blow to Miami Beach unless we can come up with a plan to go one step better than Frommer.”

The chairman passed the vodka bottle around and each member of the board took a deep swallow.

One member slammed his hand on the desk and said, “We won’t take this lying down. Maybe we can get Frommer to take a lie detector test. He might have been paid off by the Sanibel

tourist board. I hear rumors that he was seduced with blackened tuna. We have more to offer than Sanibel. We can't keep losing out to them every time. If they're sending cartons of rare sea shells to select travel writers then we need to top them. We still have Joe's Stone Crabs in our pocket."

"That's unconscionable," said another board member in between hitting his head against the wall. "We've got to match Sanibel Frommer for Frommer. Here's an idea. Why don't we get Dr. Oz to say Sanibel sand causes outbreaks of rickets?"

The chairman said, "That's a good idea. People believe him. He even urged me to go back to drinking vodka to ease the stress of my job. He's got a better reputation than Arthur Frommer. We need someone from the entertainment field also. Supposing we get someone like Bruce Springsteen to write a ballad about our Fontainebleau Hotel as being the best place in the world to find love. And we could underwrite new medical research that will prove that Miami Beach sand helps cure the common cold."

The bottle was passed around one more time. Another board member rose to his feet, steadied himself and proclaimed: "Let's just do a straightforward character assassination of Frommer. Let's claim that he hasn't traveled anywhere for ten years and has mistaken Sanibel for Miami Beach. What an expose that would be."

"No, we need another travel icon," said yet another board member. "We need someone the public will believe more than Frommer. How about our new shortstop Jose Reyes? Or Julia Roberts? Or Brad Pitt? Or Bill Clinton?"

The Miami Tourist board was grasping at straws. They each shouted out names of celebrities whose reputation they thought would overshadow that of Arthur Frommer. The chairman saw that this discussion wasn't going anywhere and pounded his gavel on the table.

"We're not getting anywhere, ladies and gentlemen. In the meantime, Sanibel is sending out countless messages praising the wisdom of Arthur Frommer. We have no choice but to go to Plan

B, which is our Hail Mary strategy. We have to announce to the world that we have proof that the Sanibel Tourist board kidnapped Arthur Frommer and forced him to say what he did.”

The Board members looked at each other and realized they were beaten. They opened a fresh bottle of vodka and hurriedly passed it from one member to another.