

'2010' junket full of fun, film

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"Your smoking is just really not helping my child," said the irate mother pointing to the six-month-old boy nuzzling at her breast.

"Well, your exposed breast just really isn't helping me either," drawled the the chain-smoking, obviously homosexual man seated on her left.

That conversation between the two people to my right occurred soon after the plane left Houston. I was headed for Los Angeles and 24 hours of fun, film and freebies. Those two were just a small sampling of the people I would encounter. I don't think I will forget them or my trip for quite a while.

First, let me explain how this little vacation in filmdom fell my way.

MGM called The Batt a while back and invited one person to Los Angeles on a press junket: a screening of "2010" and an interview session with the filmmakers and stars. MGM would pay for everything but souvenirs. Now who am I to turn down such an offer? It was the perfect opportunity to investigate payola firsthand.

So, with no trepidation and many braggartly statements of, "I'm gettin' the hell out of Dodge," I drove to the airport and boarded a DC 9. Now, I have flown before and expected some oddities but that plane was a world unto itself.

First, there was the pain incurred from biting my tongue in a failed attempt to not laugh at the aforementioned mismatch of the century. Second, there was the born-and-raised-in-Los-Angeles electrician on my left who spent the trip explaining to me why Texas and all things Texan were worthy of a nuclear bomb. And third, there was the pilot.

Earlier, back at the airport, I had noticed that Continental pilots were on strike. Or rather I noticed the signs the strikers were wearing. We're

talking true subtlety: "Experienced pilots are on strike, who's flying you today?" and "Lemons are meant to be squeezed, not flown." Those messages came back to haunt me when the plane came down for a stopover in Austin. As it touched the runway, I was suddenly thrown back in my seat as we roared back into the air at an 89.999 degree angle.

"Sorry about that, folks," the pilot says three minutes later over the intercom. "When I got on the runway, I saw that another plane was already there. Imagine that."

The problem was that I could imagine that all too clearly. Anyway, the plane eventually made its destination (one hour late) and it was time for my big chance as a film critic.

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The first event was a little get-together in MGM's hospitality suite at the Century Plaza Hotel (where they shackled us critical types). At this time, the

24 of us (20 from the United States, four from Canada) who were "university press" met each other and proceeded to amaze one another with our film acuity.

"That film just blew me away with its metaphysical symbolism, Shawn. What did you think?"

"Well, I kinda liked it."

We started on a long voyage of mixed drinks, watched clips from upcoming MGM films and discussed the various colleges from which we hailed.

"Texas A&M — Sherrill's sure not winning much, is he?"

We also watched the "professionals" with envy.

"Bob, how ya doing? We go to Chicago next, right? And then New York?"

Next, was the bus ride to Westwood for the

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