

# French Trains

*by* Steven Gowin

I can't ride backwards. I vomit, go headachy, sweat cold sweat.

But Municipal Transit trains run bidirectionally; somebody always rides backwards. And the coaches keen like banshees on rails and usually stink of pee. Bastard MT...

I catch my train six stops from my destination. One forward-facing seat remains with an empty backward-riding bench across. The guy in the forward-riding seat sits by the window. I take the aisles beside him.

Beefy, heavy but strong, he's turned his baseball cap backwards. He wears a soiled hoodie, and baggy calf-length shorts although the day is foggy and chill. Spider web ink crosses the backs of his hands, and a steel toe pokes through a worn place in his work boots. He smells of cigarettes.

When I sit in the front-facing seat beside him, I feel him tense, not from fear but from aggression. He'd rather have this bench to himself, but so would I. We ride for a couple of minutes. Finally he points to the open backward-facing seat across from us.

Why don't you sit there? He threatens, but I don't care. I won't be bullied, not when nausea's concerned. I say why doesn't HE sit there. He turns away and calls me a *fucking weirdo*. But that's ok. That's on him.

A couple more minutes pass. He relaxes a little, turns back, and says he'd almost clocked me. He's been in a bad mood, irritable, amped up. He's tired of smart asses, and the damned MT wheels screaming aren't helping.

He says he's laid off, construction, back injury... an accident, non-union job of course, no compensation, no insurance, the fuckers. He's living here with his grandma now but thinking of moving to Vegas.

Everything here is expensive. If you're not one of the tech bro google babies, what is there for you? *Asshole elites*.

I'm irritable myself. Also laid off. I'd traveled... Europe a lot, Mexico, South America, Singapore, everywhere. I'd loved that damned job. I explain about car sick.

The train wails, hell bound. *Fucking MT*, the seat mate rubs his forehead. And although I can barely hear myself say it, I blurt it; *Tires. Rubber tires*. See rubber tires dampen noise on the Metro. It makes so much sense.

He hasn't heard me though and asks *what? What the fuck?* I think to explain, but he's pushed up the sleeves of his hoodie. He's had stars and bars tattooed on his right forearm.

So I decide no. No, I shall not speak of French trains.

