

# Truck Stop

A short story - by Eric Grinberg

They went into the truck stop single file and proceeded straight to the counter with the register and CASH ONLY sign. "Good to see you all", Tustin greeted them, "Masser, Gordon and, eh, Jim was it?"

"That's right", said Jim.

"How'd you like your new run, Jim?"

"Mighty fine."

"So, will it be the usual?" asked Tustin. "Yup", said Masser.

"Okay, four breakfast sandwiches, one coffee and ten doughnuts for Masser, three sandwiches, one coffee and seven doughnuts for Gordon, and, eh, a breakfast sandwich, a coffee and one doughnut for Jim, was it?"

"You have a good memory, Tustin" said Jim.

"I see that your buddies' eating habits have not rubbed on you yet."

"They say that when you're drivin' a truck, you've got to watch your weight limit."

Tustin moved over to the register and began to ring up the totals.



"That's \$8.45 for you, Masser." Jim started probing his pockets.

"And \$6.25 for you, Gordon". As Tustin was about to ring up the third sale, Jim gave a loud sigh.

"Guys, can somebody loan me a buck eighty-five? I left my wallet in the rig." Tustin had his fingers on the register, but before ringing the sale, gasped.

"How did you guess your total's \$1.85?" Tustin asked.

"I didn't guess," answered Jim.

"You must have remembered from last week," said Tustin.

"Now Jim is a live-for-the-moment type guy," offered Gordon, "and he has a pretty good short term memory. But he's not like you, Tustin, when it come to the longterm. Which reminds me, Jim, you still have to return that piano dolly that you borrowed last week."

"Jim's also good at calculating in his head, so maybe he added up them figures real quick" offered Masser.

"Nope, couldn't have done that" said Tustin.

"Actually, guys, I should have told you," Tustin added, "I didn't get to post the sign yet. We had to raise our doughnut prices a little. National doughnut shortage. Some kind of supply chain problem. Seems you truckers aren't delivering doughnuts as fast as you're eating them. Anyhow, the posted price ain't quite right."

Tustin rang up the sale with a loud, musical "cling", and Masser paid.

"Which brings me back to the question" Tustin resumed. "Just curious, how could you tell, it was a buck 85, Jim?"

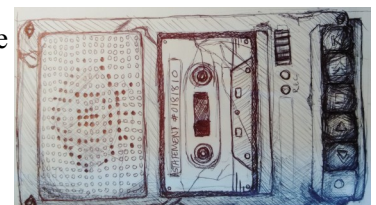
"Well, if you must know, it's *linear algebra*" explained Jim.

"Linear algebra? Is that that Learn By Cassette Tape course you're taking?" asked Gordon.

"You got one of them new rigs with a built in tape player?" asked Tustin.

"Nope, I just carry a plain old cassette tape player with me."

"You got it wired into the truck to last you for the whole trip?"



"No, I just got one of them square six volt torch light batteries and wired it to the tape player power terminals. Lasts me for a whole week."



"Pretty clever, I get it. Now tell us how that linear algebra of yours got you the total."

"Well, I figures like this. After three visits to truck stop Gordon clears three times three, or nine breakfast sandwiches, three coffees, and three times seven, or twenty one doughnuts, assuming you got them in the diner, that is. He pays three times \$6.25, or \$18.75."

"Now Masser," continued Jim, "after just two visits, clears two times four, or eight doughnuts, two coffees and twenty, count 'em, two times ten, or twenty doughnuts. He pays twice \$8.45, or \$16.90. Masser's two visit intake is just one sandwich, one coffee and one doughnut short of Gordon's three visits, and if we add one of my meals to Masser's two, we get Gordon's three meals. So if we add my bill to two of Masser's we get Gordon's bill. So what do we add to \$16.90 to get \$18.75? A buck 85, \$1.85 is what. That's how I figured it."

"That's mighty fine reckoning there, Jim" said Gordon. "I could never do that."

"Try that Course on Cassette Tape, Gordon. It's pretty good and it helps pass the time on the road." Said Jim, encouragingly.

"Don't think I could do talk-learning. I need to write things down." Declared Gordon.

"Saugerties believed in talk-learning, and he wasn't impressed with reading and writing."



"You mean Socrates, the ancient Greek philosopher, right? Saugerties is a town in upstate New York, off Interstate 87. History is not your strong suit, Jim."



"Socrates, Saugerties, whatever," answered Jim, "we're wired to talk, not to write. And besides, I do write, during road breaks."

"That explains the pile of napkins on your dash, with scribbles all over them. Neatness is not your strong suit either, Jim, though I have to say that your explanations are mighty neat. And you're definitely wired to talk, in more ways than one."

"You really ought to try this course, Gordon. I can loan you the tapes. And you send questions to the teacher. I do it about once a week, by mail."

"Do you think that Linear Algebra could make my truck routes more efficient?" asked Masser.

"You bet," said Jim. "We'll be covering Optimization in the next chapter."

Gordon gazed at the neon clock on the wall. "We better be going."



"You put a whole new spin on my day, guys. Have a safe ride, and see you next week."

As his customers filed out the door, Tustin whispered to himself "let's see, that's three Gordon's makes two Masser's plus one Jim... He grabbed the pencil from his ear and scribbled on the receipts pile:

$$3 * G = 2 * M + J$$

$$3 * (\$6.25) = 2 * (\$8.45) + (???)$$

$$3 * (\$6.25) = 2 * (\$8.45) + (\$1.85)$$

Suddenly, he was on a higher dimension.