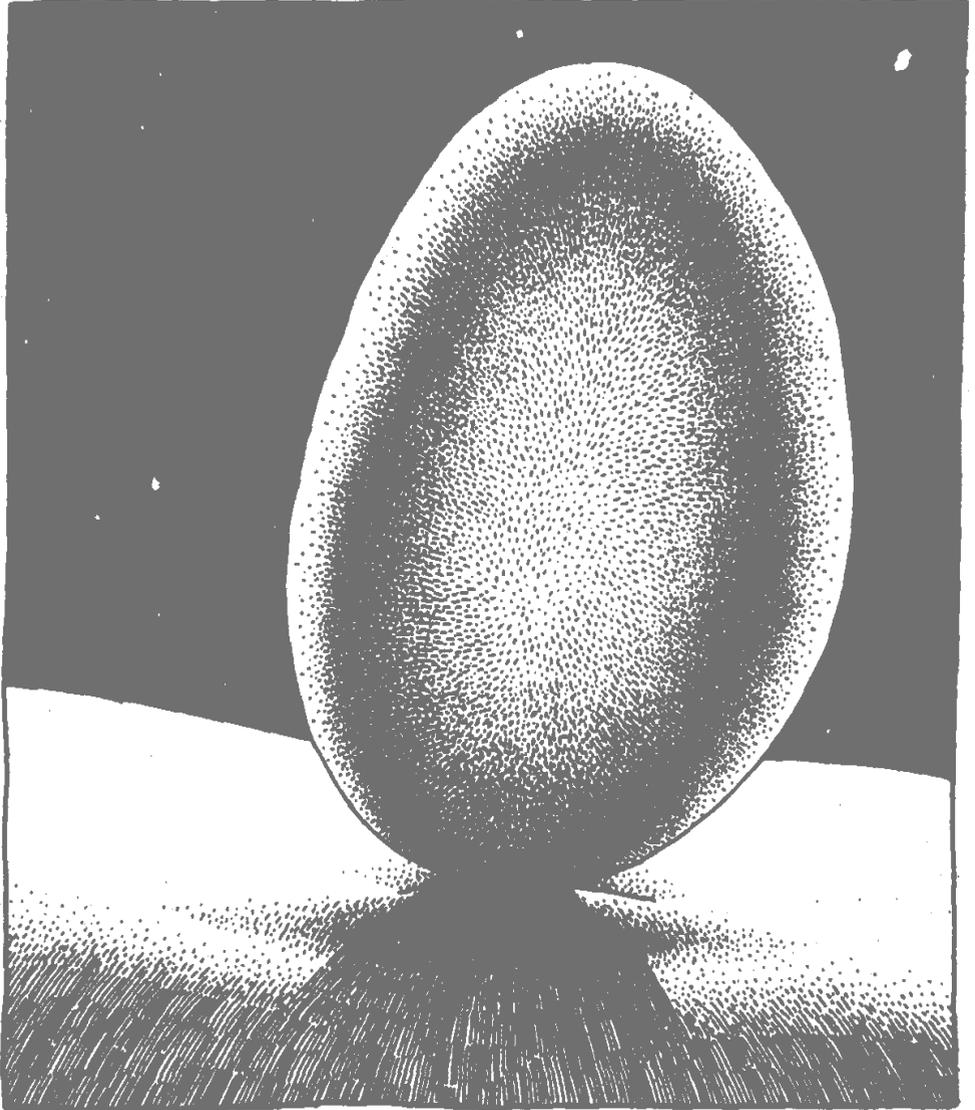


# Götterdämmerung Eight



My patio's on fire



# Pass notes

*Where the hell's Tommy?*

You haven't heard? Our glorious leader has forsaken us and gone west to seek his fortune in Toronto (at least that's what the plan was last week).

*So he and Götter are no more?*

Once he gets his act together and works out his SLIP from his PPP, he will continue to hold forth in these pages courtesy of the internet. 'Tales of Canadian fandom' - I bet you can hardly wait.

*Who have you got instead?*

In the meantime, this issue sees contributions from Damian Kearney, an ex-patriot Belfast fan now 'living' in Croydon who takes us on a tour of Turkey. We also have a jolly little item from the Monico Group's *eminence grise* Eugene Doherty, ex-editor of the notorious *Endoplasmic Reticulum*, which should keep you away from the nation's casualty wards for the foreseeable future.

*Oy, I sent you lot a letter and you haven't printed it!*

We have a sincere apology to make to anyone who wrote to us regarding the last couple of issues. All your letters were left at Tommy's house after he had gone to Toronto. Needless to say his house was broken into a few days later and among the things stolen (including a CD player and Hawkwind's Greatest Hits) were the *Götter* letters. Ignoring unkind suggestions from certain quarters that this might have been the work of Alison Freebairn trying to knobble potential competition at Novacon, we're going ahead with yet another issue without a letter column.

*Why have The Fall suddenly started making great records again?*

I don't know - maybe Mark's back with Brix.

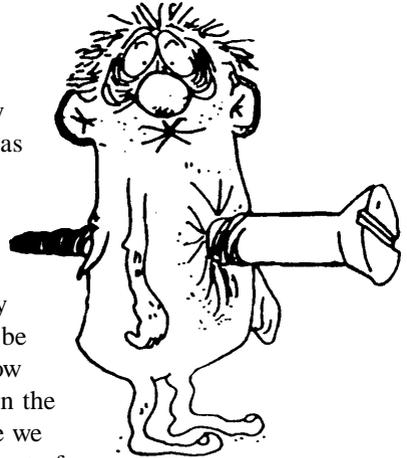
*So what do I do now?*

Read on...

# “Tommy who?”

“**T**he drinks are on me for the rest of the night lads... honestly.”

I think it was these tumultuous words which finally convinced me that he really did mean it. Tommy was off to Toronto in a few days time and wouldn't be coming back - ever. As I quickly tried to calculate how many rounds I could order before closing time without seeming too greedy, the realisation began to sink in. We would never be seeing Tommy again. This was it. Whatever had to be said, had to be said now. Ten years of friendship had to be somehow encapsulated, dissected, cogitated, and celebrated in the next few hours because this really was the last time we would have the opportunity. And then, at that moment of painful epiphany, a drunken brunette in six inch stilettos vomited violently at our table. Whatever meaningful statement I was about to make to the group was lost as we picked bits of carrot off our jeans and moved our pints out of the steaming pool of sick. Instead, Eugene smoothly filled the awkward moment by ordering double Glenfiddichs for everyone.



God only knows why, but we somehow thought it would be a good idea to have our final farewell pint in Laverys Gin Palace. There's a collective delusion in Belfast that Laverys is the best pub in the city. Personally speaking I find it comparable to drinking in a public toilet: an overwhelming smell of piss and vomit, with lots of strange people milling about who look like they're about to commit acts of gross indecency. (What more do you want from your local? I hear some of you ask.)

There had already been the official farewell party for Tommy a few nights before at Eugene's house. A time for friends to turn up to eat scotch eggs, drink cans of Miller and listen to Eugene's Cuthulu rock albums. Tommy, staying strictly to form, arrived both late and drunk, with Alison Freebairn in tow. No one actually noticed his late arrival as Eugene's wife Katherine and her sister Nicola had helpfully constructed an ersatz Tommy using a balloon, some clothes and old copies of the Sunday Times.

The real (at least we assumed it was) Tommy had arrived in time to blow out the candles of his farewell cake - an act performed to the strains of the Canadian national anthem played by the massed stylophones of the Canadian Royal Mounted Police (or maybe it was Eugene's PC- I'm not sure).

I hadn't been feeling particularly comfortable about the idea of the party beforehand. James and I had decided earlier that day that the best course of action would be to arrive at the venue already drunk. But the plan backfired and instead of experiencing the comfortable numbness of the gently pissed I arrived at the party experiencing the in-your-face hyper-reality of the truly rat-arsed. By the look on James' face he was in similar dire straits - his eyes wandering about the room trying to find focus. To cope with the feeling I stayed safely in the corner pretending to look for a decent song in Eugene's record collection.

The night ended for me with a homo-erotic arm wrestling session with Tommy and later a shambling walk home with Lysette. I was almost knocked down by a car while standing in the middle of the road trying to find the Belt of Orion. Once again a bad choice of recreation drugs.

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I first met Tommy in 1986 at Queen's University where he had just started the SF Society. It turned out to be an enjoyable night's craic and I made a promise that I would be back every fortnight. The soon-to-be usual suspects were there: Eugene, Joe McNally, Nyree, James McKenna and James McKee among others. But it was Tommy who kept the thing together with his easy going affable nature. I could see myself striking up a good friendship with him and the others. However, for the time being, it was not to be. For whatever reason I never really connected much with the group while at university. They went on to organise various conventions and meetings but it was only fleetingly that I ever came into contact with them after that. The occasional glimpse of Eugene shuffling down the street with a load of books; Tommy walking along the Lisburn Road groaning under the load of a massive Indian take-away; Joe McNally filming someone falling out of a window...

Then in 1991 I was sitting with James in his bedsit in Eblana Street and he was showing me a DTP program he had just got for his computer. We toyed with the idea of using it to put together a fanzine and, independently, the name 'Tommy Ferguson' came to our minds as someone who we could bring in on the venture. (We'd seen TASH and knew he needed help urgently.)

So I found myself phoning this guy at the Inland Revenue who I hardly knew and telling him we were going to publish a fanzine called *Götterdämmerung* and would he be interested? Does the pope wear a dutch cap? This led to a night at his house drinking

vodka and creme de menthe cocktails; which in turn, and with a horrible inevitability, lead to Tommy being evicted from his flat and the first crappy issue of *Götter*.

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Strangely, for a Tuesday evening, Laverys was nearly empty when I arrived. I was the first of the group there and sat myself up at the bar to watch Celtic being mauled four, nil by Hamburg in the UEFA cup. Customers in the bar received this pitiful performance with either looks of smug satisfaction or bitter weeping.

“Fucking hun”, someone moaned.

Despite this and despite some elderly man taking his penis out in the corner, I was in a relaxed mood. James and Eugene arrived and we kept saying to each other: “You know something? I have a suspicion Tommy really is going this time!” But even though we said it we didn’t really believe it. Not really.

You see, Tommy’s grand Canadian plan had had a long gestation period. He had been talking about it for almost a year but in a sort of offhand way that was half in jest. It had become a bit of a running joke. Then one day he said he was definitely going in November. He put his house on the market, left his job and started eating maple syrup. The clues were all there if only we’d paid more attention.

One evening he called around at my house and said, “Mark I’ve changed my mind.”

I gave a relieved laugh. As I had fully expected, he was chickening out.

But before I could say something smart-arsed he said,

“I’m not going in November, I’m going next Friday.”

\*\*\*\*\*

Sticking strictly to a tradition already mentioned in this article, Tommy arrived at Laverys both late and drunk. He had been having a final meal with his American ex-girlfriend Margaret and was in lavish mood. He waved his just purchased flight ticket about before going off to the toilet.



ONE FULLY HOUSED TRAINED GOTTER EDITOR ... SIGN HERE PLEASE!

“Shit”, said Eugene. “Let’s face it. He really *is* going this time.”

“Bollocks”, said James. “He’s just going to the toilet. Look, he left his coat behind.”

As the night wore on I thought to myself that the songs I was hearing in the pub at that moment would probably bring back memories of this evening in years to come. ‘The night Tommy Ferguson left Ireland’. I decided that I’d make a point of making damned sure that it was a bloody good song that I would associate with the evening. Then just at that moment they played the Lemonheads’ *If I Could I’d Tell You* and I thought to myself: OK, this would probably be quite appropriate. I’m sure that’ll be the one. When I hear that line ‘*You were my most imaginary friend*’ in years to come I’ll think of this last evening in Laverys. But to be honest, I suppose you can’t really choose these things - they are just imposed on you by one’s devious subconscious.

Many whiskies, Millers and Guinneses later; long after Eugene had tried to set fire to James’ eyebrows by flicking matches at him and long after someone had come around to throw sawdust on the putrid pile of vomit next to our table, which had been making our eyes sting all night, we decided to go back to Eugene’s for that *final* final farewell drink.

\*\*\*\*

I developed a theory about Tommy that night which I tried unsuccessfully to articulate. He is, you see, the Palmer Eldritch of Belfast fandom (which is appropriate as he’s a Philip K Dick fan). I’ll explain what I mean by that.

Over the course of the past ten years Tommy has single-handedly created Belfast’s 90s fandom from the dark recesses of his own imagination. Okay, so there were always a few people meeting at Whites Tavern over the years but there hadn’t been much real capital-F-for-Fandom activity since the days of *Hyphen*.

Now for someone like me this would have been a depressing situation. I would have said: “Bollocks to this” and gone off and took up something less boring instead.

But not Tommy. Tommy refused to believe what reality was telling him. To him there was always a 1950’s fandom going on in the city - it was just a matter of looking for it. You can think of it as a sort of Platonic fan world; a painfully bright reality against which this miserable world we live in is but a damp flickering shadow - a kind of *Friends* as written by Walt Willis. (Although I’m not sure who gets to play Courtney Cox.)

Despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary Tommy was always prepared to believe that there were lots of fan boys and girls out there in the city bent over a dodgy duplicator getting a fanzine ready for their next convention or hurriedly typing up witty letters of comment to be dashed of to *Attitude* or whoever.

Now, as far as I or anyone else could see, this was patently untrue. The fact was no one gave a toss and all the city could 'boast' of were a few Trekkies.

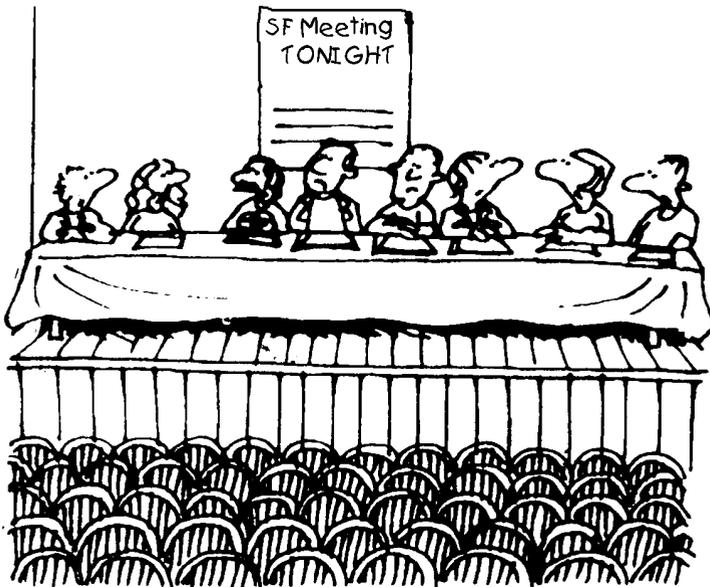
But then something strange happened. A few months ago while sitting in the Monico we suddenly realised that Tommy's pocket universe had finally achieved some kind of sickly reality. The Monico meeting were being attended by lots of new people. There were three or four fanzines being written. There was a regular weekly Monico newsletter. People were at last going to conventions in England and Scotland and talking about fandom. Someone once had a heated discussion about Orson Scott Card! Tommy even made a witty reference to Ian Sorenson and people laughed knowingly!

Sipping his pint Tommy gave a satisfied sigh and said, "My work here is done."

It will be interesting to see if Tommyworld continues to exist after his departure. I have a funny feeling that now he's gone the little fan universe, with all its idiosyncrasies and anti-anecdotes which Tommy had so carefully cultivated, will disappear with him. Ah, well... Belfast's loss will be Toronto's gain.

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And then it came time to go home. We'd got fed up watching QVC and the only beer left were a few tins of Steiger. We'd tried phoning people but it was three in the morning and most people who'd answered were a mite upset at us getting them out of bed. It was time to go.



"SOMEONE DID SEND OUT INVITATIONS, DIDN'T THEY?"

At the door Tommy said. “So this it...”

We all shuffled uneasily not looking each other in the eye. “It’s been an interesting ten years or so...”

“Listen, I’ll tell you what”, Eugene said. “Why don’t we all meet tomorrow afternoon before you go to catch your plane for a real *final final* farewell pint? It seems silly to end it here.”

Relieved, we all agreed. We’d successfully put the painful farewell off for another few hours. Tomorrow it would be. We rolled home drunk and I said goodbye to Tommy before going inside to be very sick in the toilet.

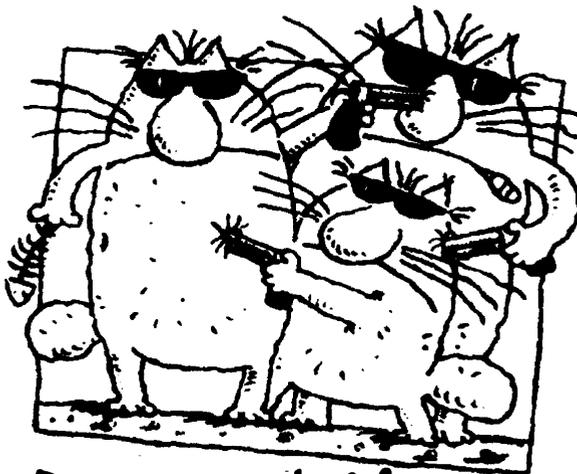
The next morning James gave him a call but there was no answer. By lunchtime we’d found out he had packed and was already gone. We didn’t have that farewell pint after all.

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A few days ago I was sitting on a Citybus travelling home from work. I was listening to the radio on my personal stereo and Shed Seven’s *Going for Gold* came on. I slowly, regretfully, realised that here was the song that my mind had decided to unconsciously link with our last evening at Laverys. Shed bloody Seven!

*“Are you going for good or are you going for gold?”*

I mean, what the hell is the significance of that!?! \



Reservoir Mogs

# Impressions of a Gavor

by Damian Kearney

**A gavor is a slang Turkish word for a non-Muslim. This year, as in the last four years, my Turkish wife and I went to Turkey on holiday. This is so we can meet with her family and friends, and have a traditional holiday too.**

We flew with Onur airlines. As we left the flight arrangements to the last moment, in hope of a cheaper ticket, we did not have any choice about the airlines; it was Onur or no-one. We had flown with Onur previously, and had vowed never to fly with them again. They lived up to our expectation. Upon boarding the aeroplane, we were greeted with a smile and an intense smell of perspiration. This intense odour of unwashed people set the mood for the rest of the flight. Fortunately, while passing through the duty-free section of Gatwick airport, I bought a litre bottle of wine. This helped us forget the service and the smell.

Neriman, my wife, is an Istanbuler, and so we flew to Istanbul. Contrary to a lot of people's beliefs, Istanbul is not the capital of Turkey, Ankara is.

What Istanbul has to offer the tourist, is a wealth of history, stretching back to before this isle became civilised. Unlike the average tourist, we did not stay in a hotel, but with Neriman's family. They live in the outskirts of Istanbul, in an area called Yala.

Yala is not one of the better sections of Istanbul. To live in one of these better areas, one has to be a dollar millionaire. What the average Istanbuler has to live with is a city without planning, business restrictions and with industrial pollution. In our street there was a saw mill that started work at 8.00 a.m. and finished at 6.00 p.m. It was an excellent alarm clock. Also, one large problem are feral dogs. These roam the streets at night, and are an annoyance due to their howling and rooting through rubbish.

Turkey is rightfully famous for its hand made carpets, but is less known that Turkish drivers also practice weaving on the roads. Istanbul's traffic has to be experienced to be believed. You may have experienced appalling traffic in Europe, but nothing can quite prepare you for Istanbul.

These annoyances did not infringe on my enjoyment of Istanbul, as the genuine warmth of the people makes these irritations seem minor. Another benefit of Turkey is the cuisine. Turkish is one of the five great cuisines of the world, with Greek classified as a variation. During our



present stay in Istanbul we did not go to a restaurant, but relied on Neriman's mother. As I found out on our previous stays, she is an excellent cook.

She knows I love dolma, and every year prepares this specially for me. Dolma is Turkish for 'stuffing' and is either vine leaves, cabbage leaves or sweet peppers stuffed with onions, rice, garlic and pine kernels. It takes several hours to prepare and tastes divine.

We stayed in Istanbul for three days, before departing for Antalya; a town on the south coast. Legend has it that King Alttos II of Pergamon sent his courtiers out to find paradise on Earth, and they found Antalya. As you can probably guess, I was looking forward to our stay there.

A friend of my sister-in-law had arranged us to stay in a hotel intended for Turkish school teachers, which is also open to the general public. This was a four star hotel, costing the teachers 80,000 Turkish Lira (TL) per day, about 70p, but cost Neriman and I about 2,000,000 TL per day, about £17. To reach Antalya we took a coach. Trains are not good in Turkey; they make BR look like an efficient service.

The coaches are luxury affairs, usually with enough leg room for a six footer, like myself, and with a complementary waiter service. The journey took 12 hours and cost about £17 for a single ticket; we intended to travel after Antalya and so did not buy a return ticket. Unfortunately my wife cannot sleep while travelling, and had a horrendous trip while I slept for approximately six hours of it.

Upon arrival in Antalya, we took a taxi to the hotel. When we arrived at the hotel, at approximately 9.30 a.m. we were told that our rooms would not be ready until 1.00 p.m. Having no choice to accept this, we left our luggage at the reception and decided to venture into Antalya. To go there we took a Dolmus. This is a minibus and literally means, "Squash". It cost us 100,000 TL for the trip to Antalya, about 85p.

Once there we wandered around town, had a beer and admired the wonderful view of mountains overlooking the sea. As 1.00 p.m. approached we returned to the hotel. Upon arrival the receptionist informed us that she had no confirmation of our booking or of the 10 million TL deposit paid. My wife tried to tell the young lady that we had sent a fax confirming that the deposit had been paid. She was also informed that my sister-in-law had confirmed reception of the fax by telephone. Instantly the woman launched herself into a long diatribe that my wife later translated for me.

She said that she was not responsible for the mix-up, that all the rooms were booked and that there was nothing available for us. This took approximately 10 minutes for her to tell. Most of that time she was defending herself against something she said that she had not done and was not responsible for; the actions of an innocent person.

Neriman eventually penetrated her defences and told that we were not affixing blame to anyone and that the matter would be easily resolved with a quick phone call to the manager. The receptionist finally relented and telephoned the manager. He told her to give us a room and if any difficulties arose that he would sort it out.

The receptionist, using typical Turkish resourcefulness, insisted upon seeing proof that we were

married. As we are used to having difficulties at the airport, we always take a copy of our marriage certificate with us. It was at this point I realised that we had finally arrived in Turkey, and my wife remembered what she dislikes about it. A typical tourist would not have these difficulties; some Turks find it hard to accept an European married to a Turk. These types of Turks are called “Kullu”, which literally means villager, but is used more like peasant. It accurately describes their open minds and wide range of experiences.

Nevertheless, you can imagine our relief. We finally had a room and my wife had not slept in nearly a day. We took our luggage and set off to our room. When we arrived in our room we found out that it had air conditioning, a must when the daily high is about 35°C. We also had another surprise, there was a loud mechanical thumping coming from the roof which would not be out of place in a David Lynch movie.

Immediately, Neriman phoned reception and reported the noise. Knowing Turkish bureaucracy we tried to get some sleep, safe in the knowledge that nothing will be done until at least the next day. Being exceptionally tired has its benefits; we drifted off to sleep, only to be awakened by a loud knocking at the door. It was a repair man; the least expected person. He tried to enter our room and I had to bar his way telling him that my wife was dressing.

We rapidly dressed and then admitted him the room. All he did was explain that this was a government place and so the staff had not got around to ordering a replacement part for the kitchen’s air conditioning which was causing the noise. He told us that the noise would stop when the kitchen shut, at 9.30 p.m..

Once again, we successfully tried to sleep, only to be interrupted soon afterward with another loud knock at the door. It was room service; two schoolboys with a vacuum cleaner. I used the universal translator; one of them was pointing at the vacuum cleaner. Thankfully my knowledge of Turkish swear words is not extensive and so I merely told them that it was not necessary to vacuum our room.

We finally got 6 hours of uninterrupted sleep. We awoke at 9.00 p.m. and went to the restaurant. There we were told that the only food left was grilled chicken, which was quite tasty, and cheap; 250,000 TL each (about £2). During the meal there was live music which Neriman told me was the cultural equivalent of karaoke at the ‘Red Lion.’ We then went into the garden and drank a couple of beers, before retiring to bed.

We had noted when we entered the restaurant that the teachers watched us enter and take our table. We again noticed that they were watching us in the garden, something that was going to recur the rest of our time in Antalya. While we were relaxing, the manager came to see us and apologised for the mix-up. He asked if everything was fine with the room and Neriman told him about the noise. He said that we could move to another floor the next day.

On our second day we rose early to get a Turkish breakfast which consisted of olives, a white feta like cheese, cucumber honey or jam and of course, bread; an integral part of every Turkish meal. We planned over the meal to go to Antalya and investigate the tourist information centres. After a quick change of rooms, we caught a dolmus for the city centre and was there for 11.30 a.m.. Upon entering Antalya we went to the first tourist information centre and were surprised at the

wealth of sites to see along the Antalya coast. We were also surprised at the traffic. Antalya uses a one way traffic system which keeps excesses to a minimum.

We also thought it would be a good idea to change some sterling into lira and spent the next hour or so trying to find a good exchange rate. It was now midday; the hottest part of the day. The temperature reached 36°C (99°F). We were consuming water as fast as the falls in Niagara and were in turn becoming human waterfalls. After getting some lira we went to the shade and had a cold beer. We decided to go back to the hotel and spend the rest of the day beside the pool, rehydrating, and go to the beach the next day.

Back at the hotel we lounged around the pool side, drank soft drinks, rubbed suntan lotion on ourselves; basically we tried to relax. We couldn't shake the impression of all eyes watching us. I was able to ignore this, but it annoyed Neriman. Time passed, and about 5.00 p.m. we went inside and had a shower and then went off to the restaurant. Another cheap meal and more watchful eyes. It was as if they never seen foreigners before; a very distinct possibility.

The next day we went to Cleopatra's beach. Unfortunately it is a pebble beach and exceptionally crowded. During our time there I noticed a man in his fifties with a young woman about 16 or 17 years old. It is not uncommon in Turkey for an older man to keep a young mistress with his wife's grudging approval. Women don't divorce in Turkey; there is intense social stigma as the woman is always blamed by her peers. We stayed at the beach for three hours, before leaving due to the overcrowding. We took a taxi back to the hotel and lounged around the pool again.

The next day Neriman and I waited until the afternoon to venture into Antalya. We arrived about 2.00 p.m. and toured Antalya which is a pretty city with large broad streets and even islands of green.

We walked down to the shore, where the touring boats were moored. We priced the tours on offer. A full day on the boat, including lunch would have cost about £10 each. We wandered around the docks and eventually sat down and had a beer. There are three main beers in Turkey, all of which are lagers: Efes, Mamaris and Tuborg. Efes is the lightest and has a crisp taste which both Neriman and I enjoy.

During our stay I mainly relied on Neriman for Turkish. I took night classes to learn Turkish, which mainly deals with the grammar which is horrendous enough. My work and part-time Ph.D. ensures that I do not have enough time to spend on learning the vocabulary. An aunt of Neriman's thought that once I learned the Turkish alphabet then I would automatically know the grammar and vocabulary.

The next day we went to Aspendos; a Roman city and amphitheatre. The amphitheatre is the best preserved, after the Acropolis. It is an amazing sight. Aspendos also hosts ballet and opera. That night was the opening night of Karl Orf's Carmen Barada. Rather appropriate for someone called Damian. After wandering around the amphitheatre we explored the city's ruins. I wanted to explore most of the ruins, but Neriman was too hot and tired so we went back to catch a dolmus to Antalya. We waited for about twenty minutes for the dolmus and chatted to some national servicemen.

Ten minutes into the journey I was rather surprised to have Neriman tell me we are getting off. I looked round to find out why and saw a tax-free jewellery centre. We went there and had a free guided tour which was fantastic. We were allowed to try anything on. I asked the price of one ring Neriman had on and the guide had to convert it from German marks to sterling, take off the tax and an extra thirteen percent as it exceeded £220. It came to just over £6000. That is approximately ten percent of the price of my house; seventeen percent of Mark McCanns and twenty percent of James McKees' first house (I kid ye not).

During the tour they offered us tea, coffee, Turkish coffee and raki (the Turkish national drink, similar to Pernot). Of course there was some soft selling going on, and I could tell that Neriman would have liked a harem bracelet. It was three separate chains of diamonds and sapphires joined into one bracelet. Thankfully I did not bring my credit cards with me; besides which, although Neriman would have liked it, she really did not want it, or so she tells me. After this we returned to the hotel and the ever watchful teachers.

The next day was a lazy day, compared with Aspendos; we went to the beach at Kemer. This was another pebble beach but was completely empty. We basked on sun loungers all day. The most distracting thing was watching stormtroopers advance over the mountains, only to be beaten back by the warm rays of the sun. At Kemer I talked with a bar steward. He was a university student and said he learned his English from American rock groups. He obviously knew how to try and impress the tourists and had some interesting Turkish popular music on cassette. It was a fusion of traditional Turkish, European rock and folk. I took down the name of the band meaning to buy a CD of them.

The following day we decided to go to Alanya; which once was a gift from Mark Anthony to Cleopatra. Nice way to impress a girl. Once there we went around the ruins of a fortress. The easiest way to get there was to take a taxi up the five kilometre road that snaked its way up the mountainside, but on the return trip we decided to walk. As you can guess it was hot, very hot, in fact it was blisteringly hot. It took us 45 minutes to walk all the way down, with one stop at a roadside café for some water. Also in Alanya we explored some caves and an ancient armoury before returning to Antalya.

The rest of our stay in Antalya was spent at the beach and at the pool side. We came to the conclusion that it was too hot to do much more site seeing. By this time we did not spend many evenings in the hotel's garden due to the teachers ever pressing eyes. Instead we smuggled a few cans of beer and raki into our room. We had to be careful as our neighbours were religious. So religious in fact that they prayed *after* sunset, so when they prayed we also prayed that they wouldn't notice that we had drink and report us to the very helpful reception staff.

In our last night in Antalya there was a power cut all over the city. It was really strange walking in the dark, trying to find a café with light. I also pointed out to Neriman that we could see all of the stars in the sky now as there was no light pollution. These kind of power cuts are relatively common, so some cafés had used their initiative and had backup lights.

After Antalya we decided to go to Bodrum. Bodrum is a lovely area. The climate is warm with an ever present cooling breeze. From the coast it is possible to see some of the Greek islands. It has a 14<sup>th</sup> century castle built by the Knights of Malta during the crusades. Unfortunately they

cannibalised Mausolous' tomb to build it; one of the seven wonders of the ancient world and the origin of our word "mausoleum". Whatever was left now is stored away in the British museum and will not be given back to Turkey; something similar to the Pergone frieze which the Germans are also not giving back.

Getting there meant another coach journey, this time with Pamukale. This is not a coach company that we would have preferred to go with, but as they were the only company to go from Antalya to Bodrum there was not much choice. Along the way we saw some goat herders. These peoples lives have not changed for centuries. Their entire existence is entirely dependent on the goats. They even still speak Ottoman Turkish they are that isolated from mainstream Turkey. No one I asked knew if they still used Arabic script instead of Latin; modern Turkish uses Latin.

The same family friend that had arranged for the hotel recommended a pansion to us. He said that it was nothing fancy, but clean and cheap. After an eight hour coach journey we arrived in Bodrum and took a taxi to the pansion. We took our luggage inside and had a chat with the owners. They told us that there was a minor earthquake a few hours earlier. Both Neriman and I had to go to the toilet, which turned out to be a squat toilet. I can't use these toilets as I cannot bring myself to have a shit on the floor and then try to wash it away with jugs of water. As you can guess we didn't want to stay there and decided that the next day we would have to find a hotel with a pedestal toilet.

That night, we went to have a drink at The Karia, a hotel that we stayed at the previous year. We got chatting to some of the staff that we recognised from last year. The previous year one of the staff asked me to "please write a romantic letter for me to a girl in England", which I declined. I knew he had several other people writing for him and I did not want to be part of his deceit. He was still there and was engaged to an English girl; one of his pen friends I presume. She is in for a shock when she finds out the average Turk's attitude to his wife; more a possession than a person.

On the way back to the pansion, we passed some street kittens. Neriman instantly fell in love with one of them, wanting to take it back to England with her. I tried to point out to her that to bring that smuggling a kitten back into the country might not be a good idea, but in our intoxicated state I couldn't even convince myself.

The next day we rose late and were thankfully not very hung over. We left the pansion, but Neriman had to buy some milk for her kitten before we could find a hotel with a useable toilet. I had not moved in about 36 hours and was getting rather uncomfortable. We quickly found a suitable hotel with a suitable toilet. We paid a deposit and went to our room with its en suite bathroom. Some people try to achieve Nirvana with the use of artificial stimulants, but I can tell you that Nirvana is merely the finely tuned snap of a well oiled sphincter.

We moved our belongings and tried to offer the lady owner of the pansion some extra money as compensation for our moving in the middle of the day, but she refused. After we moved we ate some brunch and went for a walk and drank in the climate that is unique to Bodrum, as well as a couple of beers.

Having been all over Turkey and witnessed tourists from all over the world, I have to state that the

British tourist is the most annoyingly arrogant breed of tourist that I have seen. I witnessed one person from Newcastle, with a very strong accent arrive at a café and order a “fry up” and get annoyed with the waiter because he didn’t understand. Hell, I could barely understand what he was saying. It didn’t sound much like English to me. He finally got over what he was saying by pointing at someone else’s meal and saying “I want that”.

We spent the next day travelling around trying to find a good hotel for next year. There seems to be every type of hotel to suit all pockets. We took business cards from the hotels we liked and intend to book a room with them next year. Next time I want a holiday that didn’t entail looking for a hotel, but rather have a room waiting for us.

That night we decided to treat ourselves and go to a good fish restaurant. We went to one of the best and one of the most expensive. It was on a pier and gave a wonderful view of Bodrum at night. We ordered a mixture of different fish starters. These kinds of mixtures are traditional in Turkey, called meze and often a meal can consist of nothing but meze. We knew that the meal was going to be expensive, but unfortunately the Dutch couple sitting next to us were not expecting the bill they got. They had meze as a starter and a main meal and tried to complain when the bill arrived. We had meze but as the main part of our meal and our bill was about £30, I can only guess what theirs was.

We decided to go for a nightcap. We went to the restaurant closest to our hotel and met up with some English tourists. They were an elderly couple and the bar manager said that they are in here every night drinking to all hours. Neriman and I sat drinking with them until four o’clock in the morning. I started up a conversation with the bar manager, Erfan. We talked about all things Turkish and he helped me a little with my pronunciation. Erfan told me that his rental of the bar and adjoining restaurant is the equivalent of £10,000 per annum and that he has only the holiday season to earn it and enough money for himself and his family to live on. We stayed on a little while after the other couple left and when we said that we had to leave he gave us a free drink; a cherry liqueur. It was delightful. He really knew how to keep his customers happy.

The next day we went back to Efan’s restaurant and there was that elderly couple there, still drinking their whiskey and gin and tonics. Efan and I got talking again. He taught me how to read Turkish racing horse form and even gave me a tip which came in. We even met most of his family. We were going to order some food from his restaurant and were surprised that his restaurant only did English food. I even saw a bottle of HP sauce! Instead of losing our custom he offered to prepare some food for us himself. He went into his house adjoining the restaurant and prepared some fish and salad for us in his own kitchen and not the restaurant’s.

The salad was a traditional Turkish salad, but with the most wonderful garlic olive oil dressing. I don’t know the English for the fish that he prepared, but it was better than the meze we ate the night before. Eventually we had to tear ourselves away from Efan’s company, and once again he offered us more of the cherry liqueur.

That was our full last day in Bodrum. After eating we went to the bus station and bought our tickets for the return journey to Istanbul. The next day we left for Istanbul. The coach journey this time was only eight hours. We had a week in Istanbul before having to return to Blighty. So, we visited some of Neriman’s friends. One couple had just had their first child, Candan, which

literally means “from life”. They don’t drink but bought some beer for me, unfortunately they forgot to offer me any! It illustrates how Turkish culture is not as drink orientated as ours. They only remembered they had beer at the end of the evening, and were wondering what they were going to do with all the beer they had. They didn’t drink and knew no one who drank.

In comparison we met some family friends who were from Bulgaria and the first thing they did was offer me a drink. We spent the evening with them and I got to try more dishes that I never had tried before. Some were Turkish and some were Bulgarian but all were delicious. It is interesting to note that usually someone usually speaks good English. Neriman can speak Turkish, Bulgarian, Russian, French and English. Unfortunately our education system places less emphasis on foreign languages. Most of us struggle by only in English, and barely get by as in the case of the Newcastle man.

The next day we returned to London, refreshed by our holiday and able to take on the daily stresses once again. ✍

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## “Oh Dr

It’s a curious thing that often folks think that medical and nursing people are so serious and dedicated that they have little time to be frivolous or in fact as the following shows they have all too often a sense of the ridiculous as they strive to stay sane in a world of pain. At least that is my excuse for the following collection of patient directed pejoratives. Although many have been collected by myself the bulk of this is mostly derived from CJ Sheiner’s article in Reinhold by Eugene Doherty at all naughty bookstores everywhere.

Meantime if there are any I have missed and you feel are worthy of inclusion, or if you wish to send abuse at the unfeeling nature of the caring professions, drop me a line at the editorial address.

**Botanist:** *see Veterinarian*

**Crock:** a patient who medically abuses himself, usually with alcohol. Either short for “crock of shit” or from crocked = drunk

**CTD:** abbr. for ‘Continues To Decline’, of a chronic patient who is deteriorating but still hanging on to life, also translated as ‘Circling The Drain’

**Dispo:** a patient admitted to the hospital with no real medical problem other than being unable to care for himself/herself in his/her present circumstances. Short for disposition problem

**Ethanollic:** an alcoholic

**FLK:** abbr. for 'Funny Looking Kid', of a child in paediatrics who has no specific symptoms but to the doctors just doesn't seem right. (However before making this diagnosis, always look at the parents as they may also look odd)

**FOS:** abbr. for Full of Shit.

1: a severely constipated patient, often impacted with months of unpassed faeces

2: a patient who lies to gain medically unnecessary drugs

**Fruit Salad:** a group of stroke patients, all totally unable to care for themselves. *See Vegetable Garden*

**FUBAR:** abbr. for 'Fucked Up Beyond All Recognition', of severely injured trauma patients from the likes of car crashes

**FUBAR BUNDY:** abbr. as 'FUBAR But Unfortunately Not Dead Yet', trauma victim beyond hope but who refuses to do the decent thing and die.

**Geologist:** *see Veterinarian*

**GOMER:** abbr. for 'Get Out of My Emergency Room', reserved for casualty attendees of particularly regularity and pointlessness

**Gork:** a mentally deficient patient, either congenitally, secondary to chronic drug or alcohol abuse, or following cerebral contusion or bleed. Also, to "heavily sedate"

**Gorked Out:** semi-comatose

**Gun and Rifle Club:** a trauma ward to which stabbing and gunshot victims are admitted

**Hotdog:** a flamboyant or bizarre patient, usually with psychiatric problems

**HYS:** abbr. for "hysterical" International House of Pancakes; a neurology ward occupy by patients, often stroke victims, all of whom babble in different languages

**Loxed:** a decreased state of consciousness, usually following cardiac or respiratory arrest. Contraction for 'lack of oxygen'. Also, "loxed out"

**No Squash:** a condition of irreparable brain damage, most often from trauma, intracranial haemorrhage, drug abuse, or prolonged anoxia; *see Vegetable Garden*

**OD:** abbr. for overdose. A particularly despised patient, as the cause of this malady is self-induced

**Pits:** the medical screening area of a hospital, particularly hated by physicians because of the enormous amounts of insignificant medical maladies that must be treated there in a hospital setting. Also known as the Screaming Area

**PMD:** abbrev. for 'private medical doctor'. A physician who refers his apparently ill patients to the hospital Emergency Room rather than diagnose and treat them himself. This is one of the few pejoratives directed at a member of the professional group

**POS:** abbr. for piece at shit. A general term for patients medically ill because of their own failure to care for themselves (most often alcoholics)

**Potato Patch:** *see Vegetable Garden*

**PP:** abbr. for professional patient. A person who appears regularly, either daily or weekly, at the Emergency Room for trivial complaints such as the refill of innocuous medicines or the treatment of chronic symptoms that are never present at the time of examination

**PPP:** abbr. for piss-poor protoplasm. A debilitated patient, often requiring surgery, who needs extensive medical treatment, including transfusions, before he is fit to undergo definitive therapy

**Quack:** a patient who fakes symptoms to gain unnecessary hospitalisation or drugs

**Rose Garden:** *see Vegetable Garden*

**Sad, Mad, Bad:** general psychiatric classification of depressed, psychotic, and psychopathic patients

**Saturday Night Special:** a patient, usually an alcoholic, who has spent his money, and comes to the hospital at the weekend looking for a meal and a place to stay

**Schizo:** short for schizophrenic. Any mentally abnormal patient

**Screamer:** a hysterical patient

**Screaming Area:** *see Pits*

**Scut:** menial medical procedures that must be carried out, usually relegated to the least senior member of the medical team. Also, any patient held in extremely low esteem

**SHPOS:** acronym for sub-human piece of shit. A chronic POS. A critically ill patient who, after intensive medical care and rehabilitation, fails to follow medical instructions, and is readmitted to the hospital in his previous critical condition

**Slimmers:** AIDS patients

**Stage Mother:** an adult who coaches younger patients as to their alleged symptoms, and generally states what medical tests and procedures are necessary

**Stroked Out:** in a state of decreased consciousness and muscular ability following a cerebral bleed

**Subway Rider:** a patient who comes to the Emergency Room with minor or non-existing medical complaints as a means to getting a free subway fare home

**TAPS punter:** abbr. for Thick As Pig Shit

**Turkey:** a patient with a trivial medical complaint

**Two-Carbon Abuser:** An alcoholic. From the chemical formula for alcohol, C<sub>2</sub> H<sub>5</sub>OH

**TWS, Cutters and Skulls:** A& E staff shorthand for TimeWasters, suicide attempts and anorexics

**Vegetable:** a neurologically depressed patient, usually as a result of a stroke, who is totally unable to care for himself. Also called potato, carrot, or cucumber,

**Vegetable Garden:** a group of unconscious or semi-conscious patients. Also known as Rose Garden, Potato Patch, etc.

**Veterinarian:** a physician who considers his patients of less than human intelligence. Related terms: **Botanist:** an MD with patients of less than animal intelligence; **a Geologist:** an MD with patients of absolutely no intelligence

**Water the Garden:** to change the intravenous bottles that serve as the sole source of nourishment for severely neurologically impaired patients. ↘



"After all - Alison Freebairn is not the only woman in the world!"

# Scouting for Boys

by Mark McCann

**It was April 1981 and Bobby Sands was about to become the first of ultimately ten IRA prisoners to die on hunger strike in Long Kesh prison. The atmosphere in the country, even in our tiny village of Castledawson, was fearful and brooding. One of the hunger strikers (and the second to die) was a well liked local man, Francis Hughes. Around the country the IRA were carrying out a series of bombings and shootings that had the intended effect of raising tensions and polarising the community.**

Parents, priests and community workers were fearful that the violence was adversely affecting the children of our village - particularly teenage boys. There was a belief that the passions raised by the hunger strike would drive teenagers into the arms of the IRA. In hindsight this was not too far from the truth - many current IRA men joined up during those times.

At home my mother was worried about me.

I'm not sure how she could ever imagine her first born ending up in the ranks of the Provos. I was an insular, dour pubescent kid with broken NHS glasses, acne and a soup bowl haircut who filtered reality through the medium of science fiction. My only connection with political ideology was the pseudo-marxism of Hari Seldon.

Nevertheless, in an attempt to stop myself and my equally morose peers taking up arms against the state, my parents and other upstanding members of the parish, press ganged the entire lot of us into that more acceptable face of paramilitarism - the Boy Scouts.

The theory, of course, was that the Scouts would mold us into fine well adjusted members of society. Cheerful well groomed lads who helped old ladies across the road and who could whittle a piece of wood while simultaneously tying fourteen interestingly shaped knots. The Irish boys of Castledawson were about to be saved by that paragon of Englishness, Lord Baden Powell.

I was horrified. As someone once said, an appalling vista opened up before me. You see, I already had plans for the next few months thank you very much and they didn't include many outdoor activities. I had just discovered Robert Heinlein and was about to embark on his entire NEL hardback juvenilia. My idea of nirvana was about to be ruined.

But when my mother got an idea into her head there was no stopping her and before long I found myself in full Catholic Boy Scouts of Ireland regalia. The CBSI uniform consisted of a blue shirt replete with badges, epaulettes and lanyard; smart, sharply pressed navy trousers, leather belt with a big silver buckle and penknife pouch, and shiny Dr Marten boots. To complete this man-about-town ensemble we wore a burgandy kneckerchief and an electric blue beret - worn on the head at a dashing angle. My books were forceably taken from me and I was pushed out of the house to learn formation drilling with the other conscripts in the local parish hall.

There were three leaders of our troop. The Scout Master Liam was a crusty old alcoholic who had been blackmailed into the post by the Parish Priest as a sort of act of contrition for god only knows what. His first assistant, Seamus, was a kindly, eager young man who we all took an immediate shine to. He would later be charged with gross indecency for having sex with another man in a public toilet. The last leader was Des, an ex-UDR sergeant who had undergone a huge political U-turn and was now a hard-line republican who sold copies of *Republican News* outside of church on Sundays.

These were the men who would shape the town's teenage rabble into model citizens. And what a rabble we were. A collection of moody, cursing, disinterested youth most of whom would, on the whole, have much preferred to have sat at home smoking Embassy Regal and watching the *Dukes of Hazzard* on TV.

At our very first meeting Liam the Leader informed us that we would all be taking part in a camping competition in Cork in a few weeks time. The competition, called the National Shield, involved a weekend of building things with bits of wood, living under plastic sheeting and generally getting very wet. There was a collective groan as these highlights were described to us. Being a bit of a weedy mama's boy I wanted to go home and cry. The National Shield would turn out to be my personal Vietnam.

After some hurried preparations we found ourselves on a bus to Cork. I was given Baden Powell's *Scouting for Boys* to read on the 350 mile journey and to be honest it was a text which for the first time inspired some enthusiasm in me for the tasks ahead. The book was full of images of fresh faced young boys laughing, climbing and running, erecting tents and carrying out grand projects such as building tree huts and rope bridges. My interest grew at this description of a mythical english childhood where decent middle class boys called James and Tim went scouting during half term hols from boarding schools. There was lots of brilliant sunshine, ginger ale, friendly enthusiastic adults and far as I could tell not many gunmen and no-warning car bombs. This was a lifestyle I was prepared to buy in to.

But then our coach arrived at the border town of Newry.

The residents of Newry were in an angry mood. Burning barricades blocked the road to Dundalk and the safety of Irish Republic. Men in balaclavas were turning vehicles away at checkpoints. It didn't look like we would be going on our smashing hols after all.

However, just in time, a quick thinking Des unfurled a large Irish tricolour from his kitbag and hung it out along the side of the coach. This symbol of republicanism ensured us a safe passage through the checkpoint and out of Northern Ireland. To celebrate our success everyone began singing republican songs. It wouldn't be the first time that weekend that I would find out that getting away from the troubles involved more than just putting a geographical distance between me and it.

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"Jesus, have you ever seen so much shit?"

I had to admit I hadn't. Between us we had dragged a huge 30 litre bucket loaded with two days worth of excrement across the railway halt that marked the edge of the camp and along a dirt path to the pit that had been specially dug to act as the camp's temporary septic tank. Struggling to

keep the contents of our bucket from splashing over our boots we stood at the edge of this foul abyss staring down in awe at the huge pile of turds that had been gathering there now for the past week.

“I never knew there were so many different types of brown..”

Strictly speaking each time a bucketload was dumped into the pit it had to be covered with earth to stop flies gathering. But most of us were wary about actually going down there to finish the job. We could all too easily imagine the consequences if we slipped on the way down...

Jackie, my companion, poured the contents of our bucket over the edge. Its contents splashed satisfyingly in the middle of the pit. While I cleaned the inside of the empty bucket with clumps of grass, Jackie smoked one of his Embassy Regals and absently kicked clods of earth over the shit.

It had been raining ever since we had arrived in Cork. We had been soaked as we tried to pitch our tents on the first afternoon; we had been deluged as we tried to build our fire; and it had continued to pour on our heads as we listlessly took part in the few miserable events of the camping competition that hadn't been cancelled due to the weather. I had never been so wet in my life. My feet were damp and cold, my back was wet, my hair was matted back - held in place by a mixture of dirt, water and grease; my jeans were so soaking they felt like they weighed about twenty pounds. Even a library copy of Robert Heinlein's *Citizen of the Galaxy*, which I had managed to smuggle into my rucksack with the hope of finding time to read, had been turned to thick pulp by the all pervasive rain. Not that it mattered, as I couldn't have read it anyway. My NHS glasses had been smashed during a midnight raid by members of another troop from the next tent along who had decided us Derry wimps needed to be taught a lesson. A huge figure in a black balaclava had punched me full in the face after waking me out of my sleep. I had a little homesick-induced weep to myself after this episode but was now managing to get by (though I was viewing the world through a shifting astigmatic haze).

To add to our collective grief, all that water and earth had combined to produce tons and tons of mud. It got everywhere. Everything I owned was caked in black dirt. My last haven of warmth and personal safety - my sleeping bag - had long since been penetrated with muck. The whole camp was like Woodstock without the music.

The reaction of our troop to these adversities was not exactly reminiscent of the Dunkirk spirit. We constantly bickered and fought with each other. Our leader, Liam, had given up any pretence at interest in the event. He found solace in his bottle of Black Bush and smoked Pantella cigars while watching us from beneath his private rainproof tarpaulin bivouac. He rarely spoke to us during the two weeks in Cork, delegating much of his command to Des, his number two. Des, the born again republican, was keen on drilling and army style discipline. This seemed to involve standing us in formation for quite long periods of time while he inspected our tents for contra-band. Des saw himself as the backbone of the troop - keeping us all together during those difficult times. A bit like the Alec Guinness character in *A Bridge over the River Kwai*. To us he certainly seemed to be as mad as the Alec Guinness character. I had some begrudging respect for Des though because no matter how deep the mud got, his boots were always shiny. No matter how hard the wind blew, his tie was always straight and his uniform unruffled. He had standards to maintain and by god he would see they were maintained.

My respect for him held right up until the day when, during a secret raid of his tent while he was off in Cork buying provisions, we found some of his own very special collection of contraband. Amidst piles of confiscated cigarettes and cans of Harp we discovered copies of *Fiesta* and *Penthouse* magazines. These were promptly stolen and taken back to our tent. We knew Des would never ask us about them as he would be too embarrassed to admit to their existence.

Back in the tent, faced with having to spend yet another long day under canvas due to a particularly heavy bout of rain, the stolen pornography held deep fascination for a group of mostly prepubescent boys who had never before seen a picture of a naked woman. The initial reaction to the photographs was one of horrified disgust.

“Oh, Jesus!, I think I’m going to be sick!”

To me the photos were both deeply disturbing and horribly interesting. I had lead a sheltered life up until this point and just coping with being away from home was very disorientating for me. I was on an emotional knife edge as it was and could not have been less prepared for these glossy full coloured gynaecological facts of life as presented by *Fiesta*.

“I think I’m going to have a wank.”

This was from Ciaran who prided himself on being a man of the world.

“A what?” Most of us were bewildered by the word. We’d heard of it all right (as in “Hey McCann, you wanker, get over here!”) but we weren’t too sure as to what physical act it actually related to. Ciaran proceeded to demonstrate to all and sundry what exactly was involved and the rest of us looked on in astonishment. How this activity connected to the pictures of the bony, dull-eyed women in the magazines, I could only guess at. Ciaran certainly was enjoying himself, although it all seemed a bit messy to me. That night I had some difficulty sleeping.

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On the train to Cork the next day we heard that Bobby Sands had suddenly taken a turn for the worse. It seemed that he might die at any moment. This intrusion of news from home made most of us very angry. All we could do to vent this rage was to scrawl ‘IRA’ on the carriage seats with purple felt-tip pens.

“There’s three girls in the next carriage and they’ll show you their breasts for a pound.”

It was Ciaran of course who had discovered the interesting young Cork girls who had boarded the train to meet up with the hundred smelly boys in smart uniforms who were camped near their homes. All thoughts of Bobby Sands were quickly forgotten as we rushed to the next carriage to find out what a real breast looked like.

Shy though I was, I eventually managed to force my way through to see what was going on. The girls were the same age as ourselves but mature well beyond their years. They slouched with splendid confidence in their compartment, blowing cigarette smoke at the bunch of nervous spotted wimps who were their adoring audience.

“Show us your willys, you northern fuckers.”

Somehow the soft Cork accent made this sound like the most romantic thing I'd ever heard. I was immediately in love.

"I bet you're all still virgins," one of them said.

She looked at me with disdain and I shrunk back terrified that she would pounce on me.

"I'm not", said Ciaran. "And I've got £7.50 left of my spending money."

He opened his wallet (which I noticed was a plastic thing in the shape of Darth Vader) and displayed his cash. The girls were immediately interested. One of them, who wore a distressed red woollen cardigan immediately sat on Ciaran's lap.

"I'll kiss you for a pound."

Faced with such blatant sexuality Ciaran retreated. "Well, I don't know.."

"Virgin!"

The girl thought for a moment and then stubbed out her cigarette.

"If you all give me a pound I'll show you my breasts."

It seemed like a good deal and within seconds a pile of sweaty Irish pound notes lay on the compartment table. The girl gathered them up and put them in her handbag.

"What about the breasts?" Ciaran demanded.

Promptly the girl undid her blouse and exposed her left breast. She wasn't wearing a bra. It was the first time I'd ever seen anything like it. The memory of that nipple was to stay with me for years. She looked around at her audience as if daring anyone to berate her assets. No one did. In fact we all stood in stunned silence; shocked and suddenly overcome with guilt. Strangely, the compartment quickly emptied. Most of us felt things had gone beyond a point it shouldn't have. Still little Catholic boys at heart.

"I still think you're all a bunch of northern virgins!"

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"I hope you leave this camp with the spirit of the Scouts and Baden Powell in your hearts. I am sure you have all made new friends and learned new things. All this will serve you well in your future lives as young adults."

It was thankfully the final day of our camp. The closing ceremony was a politico-religious affair involving an open air Mass and a lowering of the CBSI flag and tricolour. (Des had volunteered to take down the tricolour. It pandered to his republicanism.) A scout padre conducted the service. We stood in long columns in our once smart uniforms - now hopelessly musty smelling rags.

I was a mere husk of my former self. All I knew was that I wanted to be home in my bedroom reading Robert Heinlein and eating bags of Tayto crisps with my mother bringing me cups of tea. This whole affair - my personal Vietnam - I wanted to put behind me as soon as possible.

We eventually struck camp and packed our tents away into bags. Perversely the rain had stopped and brilliant sunshine had broken through. For the first times during the fortnight in Cork a few of us went for a walk down to the sea to pass the hour or so until it was time to go. The seafront was not inviting. A huge expanse of black stinking sand lay between the land and the water. We picked our way along wading through piles of rotting toilet tissue, condoms and other rubbish, trying to get to the water's edge. We were going home in a few hours and we just wanted the time to pass as quickly as possible.

"Look here!" Jackie waved us over to where he was standing.

We crowded around and I pushed through to see what Jackie had found. It was an injured seabird - a gannet or something similar. It had a damaged wing and seemed in a bad way. It hardly moved as we stood there looking at it. The bird gave a feeble squawk when Jackie poked it with a stick.

"Must have crash landed or something." Jackie told us. "I bet it has a broken wing."

The bird's black beady eye stared up at us.

"We could wrap it up in a coat," Ciaran said, "and take it back to the camp. They'll get a vet to look at it."

We debated this for a few minutes but no one could really be bothered and anyway the thing was filthy. It was covered in sand and oil.

"I wonder if you can eat seagulls?" someone asked. We'd been a survival training course during our stay but the nutritional content of a gannet hadn't been one of the things we'd learned about.

Jackie wandered off towards the sea puffing like mad on his cigarette.

"Where do you think all these condoms come from?" Ciaran asked. "I think they must be from England. Isn't that right, Mark?"

I nodded. "I suppose so." The bird tried to stand up. "Irish people wouldn't use condoms"

Jackie came wandering back with a sea-weed covered stick. "Might as well put it out of its misery." Immediately he whacked the bird with the stick. The bird's head was driven into the wet sand. This was a cue for the rest of us to go off and find things to beat the bird with. We took turns hammering it with rocks and sticks until finally all that was left was a bloody mass of feather, bone and tissue.

After a while we got bored and set off towards the camp. Soon we'd be going back to Northern Ireland and home to our mothers. ✍

# Hot to Trot

by Mark McCann

**A few months ago Tommy asked me to tag along with him to a meeting of the Socialist Workers Party in Belfast's Central Hall where the party was giving a talk on James Connolly and his contributions to socialism in Belfast. Tommy thought that he might be able to pick up some useful material for his Masters Degree and I was brought along to buy the drinks afterwards.**

On the way down to the hall, high on our self-righteousness, we bemoaned the death of socialism and the general apathy the subject arouses in everyone these days. In fact we agreed that we would be very surprised if anyone else turned up for the meeting. It was a cold wet Thursday evening and Manchester United were playing on the telly. All in all we were likely to be the only ones there. Although we did hold out the slim hope that a few cool trotskyst babes might make an appearance.

"But if no one else turns up," Tommy told me, "we'll fuck off to the pub sharpish. I don't want a fucking full scale interrogation by some mad SWP official. Okay?" I wholeheartedly agreed.

Anyway, we got the hall and to our surprise there was a quite a queue of people waiting to get in. I was a bit disappointed to find there weren't any young women in black berets and leather mini dresses present but I was impressed by the numbers of attendees. Nearly all were men in their fifties and sixties wearing regulation flat caps and macintoshes. Gallagher Greens were being smoked and feet were being stamped to keep out the cold.

"What's all this then?" I asked Tommy. He shook his head in wonderment.

"What I think we're seeing here, Mark, are the real socialists of this country. Solid trade unionists - salt of the earth types. It's their generation that built socialism in this country. These guys built the welfare state for fuck's sake. They don't give up their ideals."

The doors of the hall were opened and we began climbing the stairs. Central hall is a grim old building without a lift. There were a lot of stairs; arrows advertising where the meeting was being held, pointed upwards. After a bit of climbing even we began to feel out of breath. Our fellow, rather elderly, socialists were in a worse state. I was beginning to think some of them would drop dead before they reached the fifth floor.

Tommy was in cracking form. This was the world of socialism and trade unions that he believed in! He was in his element. No poncey university types masquerading as socialists. To Tommy these men constituted the core of the political aware working class in Belfast.

"You know something? I'm really glad I came here tonight. Blair and his cronies mean nothing to men like these," he continued. "They don't believe in New Labour or fucking market forces. It's honest to goodness red blooded socialism for the likes of these men. It makes me feel a bit guilty you know..." I asked him why.

“Well, there I am sitting in my house watching the telly and generally arsing about. And all along these men who, let’s face it, should be enjoying the fruits of their retirement, still have the energy to go along week in and week out to talk about real issues, important issues. Don’t you feel a bit guilty yourself?”

I had to agree with him - to intentionally climb these stairs every week demanded a hell of a lot more commitment than I’ve ever had.

“What are all the boxes for?” Tommy wondered.

I too had noticed that almost everyone climbing the stairs with us were carrying small cardboard boxes wrapped with twine. They were carried gingerly - every man careful not to nudge their box.

“Fucking strange...” Tommy looked at me and we both had the same thought. Had the SWP branched out into bomb making? Maybe the Party was trying to steal Sinn Fein’s position as the number one violent revolutionary organisation and we had unwittingly stumbled upon a DIY blast bomb class... Were these elderly men all members of SWP Active Service Units?

But it was too late to back out now. We had at last reached the room where the event was being held. We took our seats and I counted at least one hundred men in the hall. Sadly there no babes hot to Trot. Still an impressive turn out in these post Thatcher days. Tony Benn would have been weeping for joy.

“I never realised so many people still cared... “ I said wistfully.

An elderly man stood up and took his position at the podium. The audience began to open their boxes. Tommy and I shifted nervously.

The man cleared his throat. “I’d like to welcome you once again to the Belfast Pigeon Fanciers Club...”

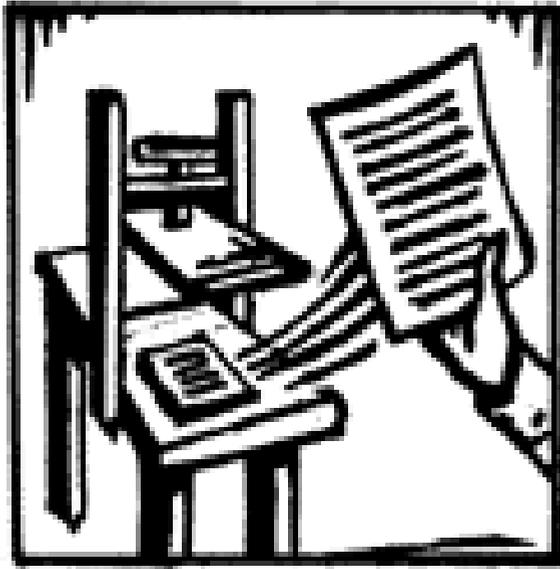
From the corner of my eye I could see my nearest neighbour coaxing a fat blue bird from his cardboard box. Tommy and I looked at each other and started howling with laughter.

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We eventually found the real James Connolly meeting on the sixth floor in a tiny attic room. There were eight people in the audience. After a tedious didactic speech, members of the audience began making pre-rehearsed points of order to each other. Tommy and I both felt deeply depressed. The truth was staring us in the face: Thatcherism has indeed wiped out the left. Socialism reduced to an obscure hobbyist activity well below pigeon fancying in terms of popularity. Christ, we got more people showing up to the Monico sf meetings... As we got up to leave, however, the door opened and in stepped two of the coolest women I have ever seen in this city.

“Is the Socialist Workers Party meeting?” they asked nervously.

Tommy and I nodded in unison and sat down again. Our hearts soared as we tried to remember what Trotskyism was all about... Things were looking up. ☞



Götterdämmerung is produced on a diminishing basis by:

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*\*Yes - stil no sign...*