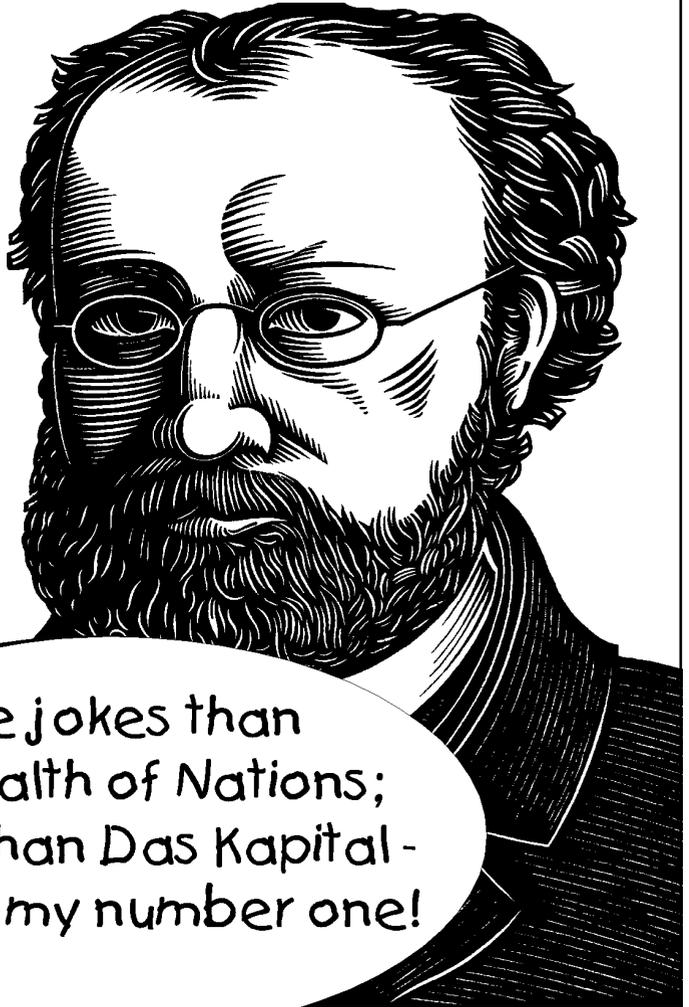


Götterdämmerung Nine

(now incorporating *Neocatechumenate Monthly*)



More jokes than
The Wealth of Nations;
shorter than Das Kapital -
Götter is my number one!

Special 'Attitude' issue

ATTITUDE ADJUSTER

Issue #9 Spring 1997

Mark

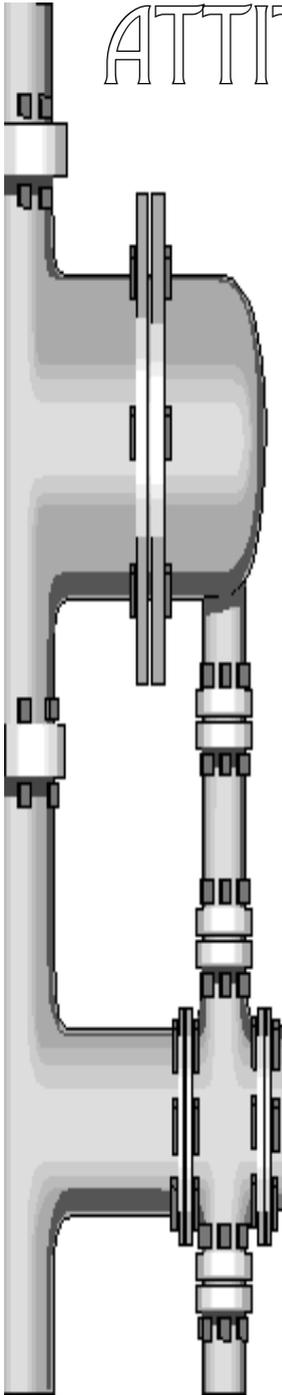
As your 'get-a-life' editor puts the finishing touches to another issue of Götter, Mark Radcliff and Lard are broadcasting their last ever graveyard slot show on BBC Radio One. I think their move to the breakfast programme is probably ill-judged (not least because I'll not be able to hear them any more) and I expect it to all end in tears (which thankfully should mean their quick retreat back to 10pm in a few months time).

As I type the Tindersticks are playing live on the show singing 'Travelling Light' - a song which makes me nauseous every time I hear it; not because it's a terrible song (it's not - I love it) but because I associate it with the time I saw them live at the Limelight; a night when I drunk 10 pints of Guinness, snogged someone who I hope was a woman and vomited all over the bathroom floor when I eventually got home. Therefore I now link being very ill with the Tindersticks. This begs the question as to why no one ever has any negative reinforcement when it comes to the alcohol itself...?

I've other reasons to be pissed off at the moment: it's February, I've just turned 30, my friends are all in far off exotic locations, and to cap it all, I've just found out that Carl Sagan is dead!

Most people I know have a severe allergic reaction to Sagan, his pearly white teeth, his attempts at poetic imagery and his New York accent (Sebastian Faulks dimissively noted: "I've little knowledge of the man - all I knew of him was that he couldn't pronounce the word 'cosmos' properly.." Ignorant snobby bastard).

But for me Carl Sagan and his *Cosmos* television series was a pivotal influence in my life. I can remember having long, excitable discussions on the school bus on the mornings after each episode of *Cosmos* was broadcast. Thirteen year old friends of mine who would never gain a



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single CSE argued about such things as quasars and Stanley Miller's organic soup experiments.

I can remember one lunchtime standing in the rain behind the school incinerator with my friends having a smoke and, as a result of watching *Cosmos*, we were contemplating death without the comfort of an afterlife. Just for a second we seemed to glimpse the concept of an infinite period of nonexistence. It was like standing on the edge of giddy precipice -terrifying but exhilarating - but then a moment later the notion was gone and we were off throwing bags of cold custard at hapless first years. It's a sad criticism of our school but there was never a time during all of our years of education which came close to matching the effect of one hour with Carl Sagan.

In fact I can pinpoint my conversion to atheism exactly to the evening the episode 'One Voice in the Cosmic Fugue' was broadcast. It was a Catholic holy day of obligation and all of my family were trooping out to Mass. As a thirteen year old I made, for me, the bold decision that I would much prefer to stay at home and watch *Cosmos* (despite my mother crying her eyes out). As I watched the programme I decided that the whole subject of god and the afterlife was an embarrassing falsehood that I could really do without. So thank you Carl Sagan (1934-1996) - any man who calls a rhododendron bush a 'close cousin' is all right by me.

Contents

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by Tommy Ferguson

As promised, the first missive from the great man in exile over the sea. An initial sketch of his first few weeks in Toronto (we no longer have to wonder as to the source of Canadian David Cronenberg's fetid imagination).

Tooralooraloo, Tooraloorapaddy

by Brendan Landers

Brendan is some geezer Tommy met in Canada. I know bugger all else about him about apart from the fact that this is quite funny. Give us a tune Brendan...

Go on, ban me...

by Tommy Ferguson

A good old chest-clearing rant from Tommy concerning the only species of human life that comes below the sf fan in the evolutionary Ladder of Cool - the Trekkie.

Havana Revisted

by Hugh McHenry

Peronsal diaries from the socialist front line. Life with Hugh, Selma & Mr Cockroach.

My god! - a letters page!

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DESIGNATED DRINKER

by Tommy Ferguson

“Well it has currently reached today’s high of minus 18 and the temperature is expected to drop to minus 24 tonight. Windchill today is around minus 45. Wrap up warm folks..”

Canada, eh? Scary. Really scary. I lie awake at night and wonder just what the hell I am doing here? The windchill is minus 30 outside, there is nowhere for me to go and the television is just like Billy Joel says it is. I have no real job worth speaking off; my friends are not the sort I can really talk to and no-one goes to the bar to meet people. Yeah, I’m scared. But what the hell, I’m here...

It really is like a different country. They talk funny here - I was told that Canadians spoke English, but was that ever misleading, eh? Not only do people have real problems understanding what I say, when they do they have no idea what I’m talking about. (“Nothing so unusual there,” I hear you say, “We’ve never been able to understand you anyway...”) I have to speak slowly and not use too many of those big words I’m fond of - and it makes it really difficult to talk to people in social situations. That is one of the reasons I feel somewhat alone here.

Another is the attitude of the people. It would appear that the whole of Toronto is about 20 years behind the rest of the world. There is a real aura of the Seventies about the town that the skyscrapers on Bay Street belie. There are an enormous number of bikes on the streets (one bike shop on Bloor is open to 2am) with the inevitable memories of Cuba. Hemp and marijuana are to be found everywhere and the popular music FM station plays old Pink Floyd, Yes and early Genesis. Personally I’m not too worried about this, I like a lot of that stuff, but even I know that you need a break every once in a while from the Hippy and progressive music. The Seventies are a nice place to visit but I don’t want to live there.

These are the sort of cultural clashes that I expected when I got here. There was no way to prepare for them. You could read up on the culture; I did. You could read up on the politics; I did, and you could talk to people who lived there. But until you trek half a mile through 20cm of snow to the gym only to find yourself too tired to even change into your lycra you never really know what is in store for you.

The weather I was told about. I thought the British people talked about the weather - but they’re mere amateurs. Here, we have real weather. Weather that matters - if it means taking an umbrella with you in Britain, here it means talking a cellular phone.

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A warm coat back home is a sleeping bag and self heating camping meals out here. It really is a question of survival. Obvious really, when you compare the sizes of the countries but the intellectual awareness pales when you come face to face with normal weather conditions that can kill or seriously injure you.

Having to deal with things like that rubs off on people. For example, it is a law here that you have to shovel the snow off the path in front of your house. This is all so obviously common sense that I didn't see any problem with it until I tried to cross the street. Where exactly do you shovel a four foot layer of snow too? I have been reliably informed it is supposed to go on your lawn - but that would mean instant death for the grass and flowers given the crap that the snow picks up lying on your front path. So the simple solution is to shovel it onto the road. Then you sit back and watch the fun and games as cars try to negotiate the small mountains of snow and icy conditions; and pedestrians try and cross the street. I've helped two older women try and cross the street already who could have done some serious harm to themselves.

I seem to remember winter starting in late October back home - it was always freezing cold on Halloween - and lasting through to those 'light April Showers'. Here however they have real seasons (not just hot rain and freezing cold rain that we had in UK) and there is the 'Fall' in between the summer and winter. Here winter starts on the vernal equinox. As the man on the radio said: "The good news is the days are getting longer; the bad news is that winter has started." Even with real bad news like that these foreigners still put an upbeat message onto it.

I used to wonder what it was like in Canadian winters. You know, you see the snow mobiles, skiing and all that other real winter stuff going on and wonder just how those people survived. I mean if the temperature is minus 18 and there is a windchill of nearly minus 40 how do you cope? Can anyone survive that and have a life? Yes, apparently. Walking to the pub the other night I saw a woman out walking her dog on the main street. She was skiing, for godsake, with the dog on a rope behind her. It's like going down any major high street in a British town and finding someone roller blading in the middle of January. In shorts.

But it is not just the large and obvious things like temperatures that belong in physics labs. As Quentin Tarantino noted in *Pulp Fiction*: it's the little things. Details, ways of saying and doing things. The attitude to alcohol here epitomizes this: people treat it with respect and don't give it the full abuse it truly deserves. There is no tradition of buying a round of drinks, and there is an awful lot of coffee and tea drunk in bars. It is like a town full of that sensible guy in the office who has one drink and then switches to orange juice for rest of the evening. And he isn't even a designated driver (Urrggh - horrible concept!). And the pubs. Boy is there ever a hike to find a decent example of the genre. The local Irish pub is a bit of a dive, and there are a few decent watering holes along the strip where I live but no real pubs.

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Allens on the Danforth is the best pub in town, so far. It is a classic Irish pub, but without the theme - if you know what I mean. John Maxwell, the man who opened and owns the bar, told me that he wanted the bar to be: "A loving testament to the place my dad introduced me to in New York: the Irish bars and American saloons."

Although I've never been to New York, by entering the place I think I know what he means: a long bar facing half a dozen snugs, panelled in dark wood, opening out into a restaurant floor divided down the middle again with panelled wood. It has a classy feel to it and yet retains the smoky atmosphere, with hunched figures of determined drinkers at the bar. It really is a sort of up-market Irish bar.

Compare this to *McVeigh's* on Queen and Church, a real Irish bar, much in the vein of *Lavery's* (See *Mark's editorial in Götter 8*): bad pop music in background, and in Canada they really know how to produce bad pap music, horse racing on TV, foul beer at extortionate prices and deeply annoying customers. Back home all this would be taken in stride as par for the course, if you wanted anything else you had to go to a restaurant and that was a woosey thing to do anyway. 'What's wrong with abusive staff members, horse racing and a shit atmosphere? You queer or summat?'

In Canada you're considered weird and strange if you would put up with such conditions, something that John Maxwell has noted well - he retains the atmosphere of being in an Irish pub but gives you all the service, politeness and efficient service you could want.

The small things make it different. There is a highly regulated off-sales policy: all the places selling beer to the public are run by the government, no beer or wine in the supermarkets. There is no turf accountants or bookies - all gambling is based on the tote system so it is nearly impossible to judge form. Pool and snooker halls are social places, where you bring a date, or the family for lunch; hanging out here is seen as responsible and won't lead you to becoming Jimmy White or Alex Higgins. These are things that you can't prepare for, no matter how good your preparations are.

Now that I'm here though, I'm staring to acclimatize. One of things I've done is get fit again. Most people here do some form of activity, whether it be sports or just messing about in the gym. So I made a New Year's resolution. I've joined a local Community Centre which has a quaintly old fashioned exercise room, gym hall and, best of all, a 50 metre indoor running track. Joy. It also has squash courts (not much use for them after my ligament disaster) and apparently there is a pool as well in there somewhere. It gets me out of the house, makes me get up and do something in the winter (with the computer I could stay in - get beer and pizza delivered via the net - all winter).

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I'm beginning to pick up on the politics as well. It is a really fucked up system. Local government is the town hall, or city hall as it is here, running 'metro' Toronto (akin to the old Greater London Council). Then there is the Provincial government, which is based in Toronto and is responsible for running Ontario, roughly equivalent to the Scottish Office, or the Northern Ireland Office, but with the powers of the London parliament. Finally there is the Federal Government - the government of Canada with defence, Foreign Affairs and all that malarky. Each three levels has their own "cabinet" and "opposition" and well, to be honest, its all a bit messy. I mean local democracy is all well and good, and there are a couple of Toronto fans well into it, but really who gives a toss?

Local government is there to give power hungry local big wigs somewhere to go and stay the hell away from real people in the pubs. So the Provincial government is going to abolish Metro and amalgamate the surrounding neighbourhoods into a megaopolis of Toronto. Yeah, go ahead. I mean really there is more to life than worrying about bill 103. Have a drink, check out a movie, read a book - get with the program, enjoy yourself, and if you can do that whilst earning an income be thankful.

It is like that sign allegedly on the back of Los Angeles Airport taxis: "Welcome to LA. Please adjust your attitude." Canada is significantly different to be challenging to my life's conceptions, but similar enough so that the challenge doesn't completely overwhelm me. At least I feel able to deal with the paradigm shift that has become my life, although I'm not too sure I can survive much longer without my Bourbon Creams. ↘



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TOORALLOORALOO, TOORALLOORAPADDY

By Brendan Landers

It's pushing six o'clock on a weary Friday evening and another week's work is done. It's time for a cold one. Gritty and grimy and crusted with dust I'm shower fodder, me, and I'm going out tonight, but shag all that for now. It's after work on a Friday and a mug of beer is the only thing. It's a sacred ritual, the Friday beer, since the dawn of the working class.

And I'm not one to break with tradition.

I find a pub. Not too flash. A little grimy like myself. A blue collar place with room in it where a guy can drink alone and unwind in peace. The boozers dark and cool and quiet. I sidle up to the bar and take a pew. A peaceful, ruminative, private beer I'm in the humour for, to gather my thoughts and plan for the weekend.

The barman eyes me and I call for a blue.

I keep my head down and voice low. An Irish accent is like a clarion call to all and sundry to come and shoot the breeze. There's a perception prevalent abroad of the Irish as affable confessors. Hollywood's to blame for it, I reckon. Bing Crosby in *Going My Way*. Spencer Tracey. Pat O'Brien. Their roman collars fit them like tracheal condoms. Manly priests with hearts of gold and ever-ready ears. Tinseltown has a lot to answer for.

The barman pops a Blue and plonks it down in front of me. Walks away.

He knows the score. Knows when a weary man wants a quiet space for himself and his beer. Such appreciation of space is priceless. I've seen the beach lined with cars and men in them reading their papers on a Sunday morning having escaped from their own homes because their wives of twenty years haven't gained this knowledge.

I sit up on a stool and knock back a slug. This is the crucial moment. I've spoken once, don't have to talk again till I'm on my way, just tap my glass now and then for a refill. But two stools down a punter's eyeballing me from under his hard hat. A boozy sweat is crawling down his face and his eyes are glinting with the light that gives drink its demonic reputation. He swallows half a boilermaker.

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“Irish?” he says.

So much for my quiet beer. “You guys like your booze, I hear.” he says.

The Irish as drinkers. Barry Fitzgerald perpetually pickled in *The Quiet Man*. Victor McLaglen crying into his beer in the same film. McLaglen crying into his beer in *Fort Apache*. In *She Wore A Yellow Ribbon*. In almost every movie John Ford ever made.

I shrug. I know better than to argue. All you achieve is grief and frustration. I’ve tried telling them that the caricature of the hard-drinking Irishman is largely a myth. That a *Toronto Star* survey a couple of years back showed that the Irish ranked pretty low on the totem pole of drinking nations. That, per capita, Canadians drink more than the Irish.

“I like a man who can hold his beer,” says boilermaker’s buddy, a roly-poly man with a Blue Jays baseball cap and a gut hanging out of him that could comfortably contain Milwaukee. He lifts his glass for a toast.

“Here’s to the little people - to the leprechauns,” he says. Leprechauns. Spare me.

I have a theory about the origin of the leprechaun phenomenon. I reckon an American dreamed it up, a Hollywood scriptwriter maybe, halfway through reading *Lord of the Rings* on a hiking holiday through the Wicklow Mountains. Stopped to make a lunchtime sandwich of the local mushrooms, the magic ones. Spent the afternoon spaced out while little green men with funny accents pranced across his befuddled periphery.

Baseball Cap orders a rye and ginger. And a fresh Boilermaker for his buddy. Who turns a beatific grin on me.

“You Irish like to mix it up, show those Brits a thing or two, huh?” He throws a sly look at my tote bag. “Maybe you have some semtex stashed away in there, eh?” he says.

Nyuk, nyuk, nyuk.

Hollywood. John Ford again. *The Informer*. Mickey Rourke. *A Prayer for the Dying*. Harrison Ford. *Patriot Games*.

I have my stock answer for this one. “I’m a pacifist,” I say.

He breaks his heart laughing. That’s a good one, he reckons. Someone else joins in

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the chuckling from further down the bar. A woman in a denim skirt and tie-dyed T-shirt. Getting brave on her third or fourth gin and tonic.

“An Irish pacifist - that’s an oxymoron if I ever heard one,” she says.

Oxymoron. This one’s gotta be an academic. Only an academic would use a word like oxymoron in a working class bar on a Friday evening after work. Academics can be the worst. They’ve read all the books and think they know it all. And they’re duty bound, they reckon, to share their pearls of wisdom with the rest of us.

This one’s on a roll.

“My son,” she says, “lives with two Irish boys who have just arrived from the old country. He says that they complain incessantly about the Canadian food. It’s too foreign for them. All they ever want to eat is meat and potatoes he says.”

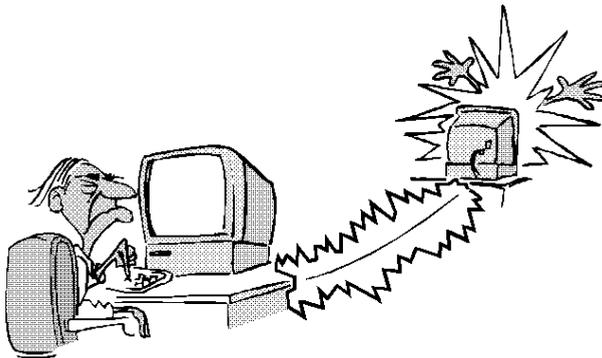
“Really?” I say. It’s supposed to sound sardonic, but I may as well be farting at a thunderstorm. “Really,” she says.

Boilermakers feeling no pain. He’s ready to party. “Sing us a song, Paddy.”

Paddy! Men have died for less. Boilermaker launches into a chorus of *Danny Boy*. He has a voice that constitutes cruel and unusual punishment.

The Irish as singers. Hollywood again. John Ford again. Bing Crosby again. Tooralooalooing all over the silver screen. I’ve had enough. I knock back my beer, toss a few bills on the bar, leave them to it. I’ve got better things to be doing. Bigger fish to fry.

I’ll go home and freshen up. There’s a fund-raiser tonight and I’m singing a few songs. I’ll mill some bacon and cabbage. They’ll be plenty to drink - I’ll murder a gansey-load of pints. And maybe they’ll be a bit of scrap. I haven’t had a good scrap in months. ↘



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GO ON, BAN ME...

by Tommy Ferguson

As is well known I have a some problems with Trek fans but this does not extend throughout the fandom generally. Dave Lally is a classic example of an out-and-out media fan, but isn't completely sad. Close, it's true, but not completely. He knows about books, has even read a few I believe. He does, occasionally, dress up - but this is in a remote and inhospitable village in the South of Wales. In the winter. So that is all right then. I'm a fannish fan: books, fanzines, beer that sort of thing, yet we can both relate.

There is another Irish media fan called Damon Wyse (Oh the joy of a name like that). He is a media fan, specifically a Trek fan. He organises lots of Trek clubs, events and spends the whole of Octocon (The Irish National Science Fiction Convention) dressed in his Trek uniform. He also wears his costume in the 'real world' and lives his life by, and through, Trek. I know these things because he took great lengths to explain them in an interview, on audio tape, to Joe McNally one year. Apart from all that he is lacking in even the basic of social skills, personal hygiene and thinks irony is the property of metal. We cannot relate to each other except through the medium of a big, pointy stick.

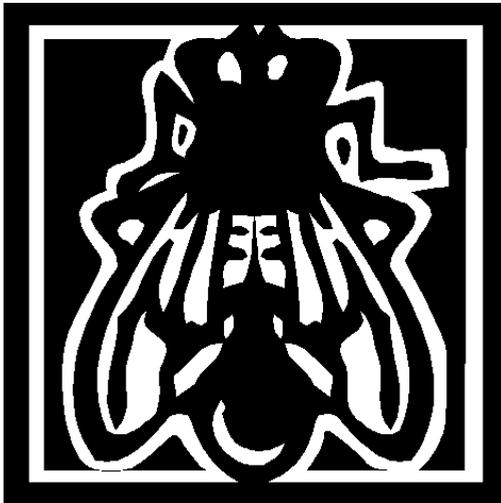
I generally don't like Star Trek. It's badly written, appallingly acted and has all the direction of an Irish Traffic sign. I do like some of the concepts employed in the show (The Borg, for example) and, on a completely base level, some of the actresses are cute. What is important though is that, like Dave Lally and unlike Damon Wyse, I watch the show with my critical faculties switched on. Dave can tell crap television at a glance, god knows he has watched enough of it, but sad Trek fans like Damon just can't see past the Star Trek logo. 'Star Trek: Turds in Space' would be welcomed without any thought.

The other problem I have with Trek fans is the immersion of their personal lives into that of the fictional characters which illustrates behaviour which is highly suspect, to say the least. Even for fans. Most fans are psychologically suspect - some more so than others: a lonely childhood, reading too much, lack of social skills in their teen years and personal appearances which are out of place in the 'real world'. The point is that most of us are aware of this and therefore happy in fandom. We don't sublimate these feelings and emotions into other, fictional, lives. We don't live out our dreams and ambitions as Worf or Data or some other COMPLETELY FICTIONAL character. Never has the phrase Get A Life been more apposite used than towards serious Trek fans.

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A wonderful example of this occurred at Albacon '96, a general Science Fiction con in Glasgow, where a woman was walking around wearing Spock ears. I couldn't figure out whether this was incredibly Post Modernist funny or just plain old sad. Being especially blunt after a few pints of Dutch courage I went to ask her. I was brought up short however when she started to show these ears off to a friend in full ST regalia. I watched as she obviously brushed back her hair to illustrate the method of affixing them to her ears. Post Modernist Humour? Jesus Tommy, ever the optimist.

Finally why I don't like Trekkies is for the sheer hell of it. This is a recurring theme in my fanzines and the Belfast SF Group ('The Monico Group,' as it is known) as a whole. It is simply a question of having Mad Desperate Fun slugging these media fans off and Star Trek fans in particular. Check out their complete lack of a sense of humour. Even in fandom if you go around dressed up in costume, regardless of whether it is Trek or not, you know you are going to get the piss taken out of you. You need a thick skin and sense of humour. It is not as if we are anything special, if we didn't have all these other sad fans to take the piss out of it might turn back upon us. My motto is: Don't accept them. Don't try and explain to them the error of their ways. Just shoot from the hip and pray you get them all. ☞



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HAVANA REVISITED

by Hugh McHenry

I'm sitting in front of the television; it's 11pm on a Monday night and who comes on the fucking telly but Dave Trimble, Ian Paisley and Seánor Gerald Adams. So what, I hear you say! It's just that they are precisely one of the main reasons why I've come over here again. Couldn't get far enough away really...

I was to leave Norn Ireland at 7am on Thursday morning. At least that was the plan. The flight was delayed - congestion at Heathrow they told us. I was met at the airport by the guy who prints the *Cuban Solidarity Magazine* in the UK. I had loads of time to kill so we went to his printers where I was given a tour around; not the most exciting experience, compounded by the fact that I was suffering from some dire need of sleep -I had been having a few tipples of that demon Kilkenny beer the night before till about 2am and had got up to go to Belfast International at the ungodly hour of 5am. So I grabbed the letters that were to be delivered to friends in Cuba and made my merry way towards Damian's house lugging my 35kg plus load of luggage. Crashed out, met Damian and Neriman a few hours later.

Next morning I got up at 8 a.m. with the inevitable hangover. Serves me right for mixing rum with red wine. (Excuse me, I've just stepped on a cucaracha or cockroach which are very common in Cuban homes, or at least those in which I have had the good fortune to end up in. They really are such cowardly beasts, run at the slightest movement they do...)

I got my visa for €32 which I was told I had to pay. That was standard policy they said, despite the fact that the Cubans in Havana had already assured me (and still do) that it had been paid for already. Bueno, the visa had been paid for twice and today the personnel chief seemed to think that pursuing the matter further was a bit of a lost cause...

Saturday, 21 December 1996

A fairly standard flight in an old Soviet plane: a spoilt boy in the seat in front with his Xmas farty-sounding joke toy (the problem was that he seemed to be providing the associated aroma as well...) An Irish guy from Dundalk with his Cuban wife (the only Cuban girl I've ever met in Ireland). They were friends of the Cuban who a few days previously had phoned me to take some medicines and a few cards back to his mum and friends. He sent me 35 large, heavy Xmas cards instead! It appears he had been claiming social security under four or five different identities and had even been caught for his sins. Lucky he wasn't caught in Tory Britain...

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Stop-over in the city of Cienfuegos, then Havana's Jos, Mart; International Airport at midnight local time, I had been flying from 4pm till 4am our time. I was met at the airport by the head of personnel, a crazy Mayo friend called Declan and my little petal Selma; was taken to the apartment in a semi-daze, a mixture of euphoria at being here and sheer, unadulterated tiredness. Bloody hell, the apartment was brilliant, spacious, clean and with a balcony overlooking Havana's shores. What more could a man wish for? (except, that is, for sun, sand, sea and... there was no snooker here though!)

Unpacked leisurely on Sunday, did a bit of cleaning and killed a few hundred of the dreaded cucarachas. Declan has gone on a yacht with a couple of friends so we won't see him again for a few days. We're invited to a wedding reception on Friday.

A bit of background to back up Tommy's piece a few month's back. Cuba is a

SONIC FICTION REVIEWS

"Everything from the name of their label, Duophonic Ultrahigh Frequency, to tracks like "Moogie Wonderland", "Outer Accelerator" and the angelic "Space Movement" exemplifies (the) sonic fiction (of StereoLab). Each song title announces a new manifesto, a sonic theory. Far from nostalgic, '90s Space Exotica makes audible the futurism smothered by the snickering kitschedelia of last year's Easy Listening spree.

Because the(ir) Moog synthesises new but limited tones, you can never quite locate the source of what you're hearing. Noises, the origins of which are unknown, de-realise your perception, compel strange sensations of unrecognisable unrecognition that force you into chains of analogy and comparison, demanding that you invent new names to communicate what you're hearing.... 'sonic fiction' - the convergence of science fiction and sound in which the track seems to come from another world, an off-world system that the title c(l)ues you into."

Kodwo Eshun on StereoLab and the re-emergence of the Mini-Moog in popular music (Wired, Jan. 1997)

"They've got this weird sound that goes on for so long you want to vomit - it's really cool. And the lead singer, that French babe, Lætitia Sadier, well, she's a bit of a ride..."

Mark McCann on StereoLab and the re-emergence of the Mini-Moog in popular music.

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country where Marxism-Leninism has been the norm since the triumph of the Revolution on January 1st 1959. Its tremendous record in the areas of education, health and agrarian reforms are such as to make all the rest of Latin America flinch with shame. It's an island about the size of Britain. The Yanks say is a threat to them - it is! But not for the reasons they give. It's a threat to them precisely because it's an example of how things could be in the above areas. It's a society of different racial mixes because of the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors and then the African slaves, so eagerly traded by the British and Dutch. One would be naive to believe that racism does not exist here, but it's not on the same level as in Britain, not to mention the U.S. of A.

Basically Cuba poses the threat of a good example and is thus listed as 'Rogue State numero uno'. It's time to give these people the respect they deserve and let them get on with their lives, not to mention complying with international law.

Monday, 23 December

Went and signed contract for my new translating job today, then caught a guagua (pronounced 'wa wa') to Selma's house to get some stuff I'd stored there. We haven't time to go return home so instead I go along to see her practising with her 'focloric' dance group, complete with pots and pans, radio, fan, etc. The dance has its roots in Afro-Cuban mythology and was well worth seeing. The practice session was held in an old disused warehouse which looked as though it was about to fall down around our heads and at one stage I had to leave with everyone else choking or holding handkerchiefs to their mouths around me. It's nightfall and Northern Ireland is back on the television. It's time to stop...

Tuesday, 24 December

It's now Christmas Eve and I feel pretty crap because what was initially a bit of a sore throat yesterday has blossomed into a full blown cold, an extremely runny nose, sore head, etc. The guilty party was either Mark McCann or Selma but I can assure you that the former party was not snogged! Selma has just informed me that I'm to teach her computing but that will be pretty difficult as I know very little about it myself, plus the Word 6 I have is in English.

This morning was spent thus:

1) Went to the agromercado (Farmers' Market) where \$20 were changed at the current rate of 20 Cuban pesos to the Yankee dollar. This used to be quite an underground, shady affair but now the state is taking on the black marketers by offering their own rates! (The official bank rate is one for one). Bought some bananas and mandarin oranges, 20 bananas for 10 pesos, or the equivalent of a day of my wages here (=33p approx.) Literally ran into a colleague of mine from the Portuguese department of Granma International (the international edition of the

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Party newspaper). She was given some Christmas letters for a colleague in the English department - better to deliver personally as the mail system is slow and unreliable.

2) Rushed to a bodega (grocery store) about 2 miles away and just about made it before lunchtime closing at midday. As I no longer have a ration card I have to find an alternative source for such vital foodstuffs as salt and sugar which cannot be found in the agro. What I was doing was purely black market but I was helping out Selma's cousin who works there, as well as myself, of course. Ended up lugging several bags full of salt, sugar, rice, beans. Got some more oranges in a government subsidised market round the corner. Then it was off for some...

3) Ice-cream! Cuban ice-cream is simply one of the best there is. The only drawback is that you have to join the queue as the Cubans simply love it, hail, rain or shine! Got two big platefuls for five pesos, simply adorable.

4) Went to the local bread shop near my previous address where the jefe, (boss) welcomed me with open arms, another black market deal, you only get one piece of bread per day on the ration card, I don't have a ration card...

5) Got a pound of tuna fish and another type of fish which I've never heard of before. The fish store is six months old like the rest of the chain and is another demonstration of the improvements made in the food supply here since the start of 'Special Period', initiated after the fall of the Soviet Union.

6) Selma's boss pulls up in his Lada, offers us a lift to my new abode.

7) After a quick lunch of a meat-type sandwich (not much meat in it) we set out for Selma's house again where I have to pick up some more stuff. The first bus arrives and takes about seven persons on board only. The public transport system isn't so bad but there are only a limited number of vehicles, public and private, so most people are obviously left waiting. By the time the third bus arrives, over an hour later, a row has developed as to who is behind who in the queue. However, the Cubans are a dignified people and by the time the next bus arrives the queue has become orderly and we set out, standing for half an hour as the guagua is full to bursting point. Get dinner in Selma's: egg omelette with rice and beans, Cubans are not natural vegetarians, it's just that meat is expensive. By the time we set out for home, it's about four hours later, most of the time having been spent travelling, I am absolutely dying from the cold and make straight for bed. There's a Cuban history program on television which I do not think I'll be watching tonight...

Christmas Day, 25 December

I wake up at 6 a.m. with vehicles roaring outside and a splitting headache and

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extremely stuffed nose. Today is just another working day in Cuba. Physically speaking, I feel like shite. However, after two lemon teas especially prepared by Selma and four paracetamols the pain is numbed.

To think that I spent twelve full days in Belfast consuming morphine sulphate and undergoing hit-or-miss blood draws as part of a clinical study in order to get the money to live here!

The next couple of hours are spent giving the flat a damn good cleaning, can't complain, the worst bits are the corpses of the cucharachas strewn about the place, one at a more advanced state of decay than the other. Hunger takes over and we decide to call it a day. For lunch we prepare some boiled rice, beans, fried onions and fried tuna, with cabbage scrapings as a starter. The food is definitely not as tasty as in Ireland, I think. I try to reassure myself that the cold is affecting my taste buds but remember the countless rice and bean dinners of previous Cuban days...

The afternoon consists of shopping for some odds and ends in a dollar shop, items unavailable elsewhere e.g. washing-up liquid and a spray to kill the many living cucharachas still roaming the flat!

Selma spends the early evening with her folkloric dance group while I go to bed with a couple of paracetamol, we sort of agree to go to an ex-work colleague's to pick up a box of my stuff and a bike which I left there before returning home in June.

A couple of hours later I am awoken and taken away in an old Soviet lorry to get my luggage. Selma decided it would be cheaper to borrow the group's transport than call a taxi. An hour or so later we arrive home, minus the bicycle which has been dismantled and is now in someone else's house, the lorry having dodged most of the potholes and me having met a lot of my neighbours, at this stage my head was thumping again and I longed for bed...

St. Stephen's Day, 26 December

Awakened at 7am with the blinding sunlight, Jaysus I must get a curtain for that damn window! Finish the cleaning and proceed with breakfast/lunch (brunch?) which is the same as the previous day's. Bread for breakfast is not an option as it has run out and a local supplier has not yet been identified and befriended.

Spend the afternoon in Havana's ice-cream park which is only five-ten minutes walk away. Its claimed to be the biggest in the world and has a capacity of a few hundred people when full. Lucky it wasn't full today, so we only join one queue instead of the usual two and are at our seats in about fifteen minutes. Opposite us at the table are a young Cuban couple with their child. When we get today's offering, mango

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ice-cream, which for Selma is adorable and for me too sweet (and that's with a heavy cold!), the father fills the child's bottle with ice-cream and feeds it like milk. The boy, they tell us, had his first birthday a few days ago.

We decide to go after two plates each and ask for the bill. As is often the case because there is a foreigner present (i.e. moi), the woman attempts to overcharge. We rush off to buy a bottle of three year old Old Havana Club rum, about \$6 a bottle. Selma heads off to her dancing and I happily guzzle my first taste of real rum for six months. (Incidentally Havana Club rum is manufactured in the former Bacardi factories, nationalised after the triumph of the Revolution and is infinitely superior, not least because it contains a lot less chemicals.)

We try to phone Declan as he's to tell us the details of tomorrow's wedding but he's unobtainable, must still be out at sea somewhere...

Friday, 27 December

Again awoken very early with light and noise. Realise that there isn't really any decent food in the house that one could reasonably be expected to stomach for breakfast, rice, beans, a sachet of vegetable soup (from home), any suggestions?

We decide to try and look for some bread. There doesn't seem to be any decent black market sources nearby so we head for the dollar shop. Must be patient, there are about thirty people ahead of us in the queue. Finally make it inside the confines of the store, some Bulgarian woman decides to buy six out of the last seven remaining rolls, are we lucky by the skins of our teeth or what? The bread looks like dried dough but we are happy, that and some mayonnaise I had bought for dollars the previous day means we are set up for breakfast.

Next port of call is a house which supplies black market food. The woman remembers me and asks me immediately how my parasites are. Very dead I hope, I pray to myself. (I had had some stomach problems during my last stay.) Bought a dozen eggs for about a dollar and a half.

Still no news from Declan so I phone him. He has just arrived back from the remotest parts of Western Cuba, thumbing lifts, no mean feat here, I assure you. We agree to meet at the wedding reception that evening. In the afternoon we decide to revisit the ice-cream park. However it turns out that they have run out of ice-cream and after queuing for one and a half hours we decide to head home. The other people waiting don't seem that bothered, the Cubans must be the most patient people in the world. But we have a wedding to go to...

After dressing up we stop a passing car which takes us to the other end of Havana's picturesque seafront drive for a couple of dollars. It can be done for half the price if

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one is Cuban and has time to haggle, I wasn't the former and I didn't have the latter.

A couple arrive at the restaurant - a German woman marrying a Cuban guy. I also meet an English couple who got married in Havana on Christmas Day 1995 dressed in Che Guevara T-shirts. Declan informs me that he has spent the previous night in the police station in Western Cuba and that he is absolutely starving! He had been travelling on the boat with a Yank and a Canadian who had assured him that they were authentic Socialists, the police were not convinced...

A couple of beers are downed by me and then my problems start. Halfway through the second beer I get severe cramps in the lower abdomen. Just then a mountain of food is served, but it is all I can do to nibble it. I head straight for the loo where I just about manage to squat over a toilet rim covered in piss. The urinal is half full of water before I start and completely full before I finish, I have just about enough napkins stored away in my trouser pockets to leave that place in a semi-dignified manner. By this time Selma and everyone else have finished their meal (Declan having eaten both his and mine). Some guy starts playing the bagpipes accompanied by dancers in leotards. Normally I would have given them a good proportion of my attention, not tonight though... Selma takes me to the local clinic where the doctor says I may have caught a virus and prescribes me some re-hydrating salts and tablets for reducing fever, Jaysus that's all I bloody need! I head home and straight to bed, complete with another dose of the runs.

Saturday, 28 December

I am now feeling a lot better than during the last few days. After a full breakfast of bread and omelette we go to get some powdered milk on the black market, normally this is very hard to come by and is extremely expensive in the dollar stores, about three times the price I paid.

As soon as we return home Selma has to rush off to her dancing, we agree to have some more ice-cream in the evening at the ice-cream park.

I spend a good part of the afternoon spraying possible cucharacha hiding points and killing them as they try to escape the line of fire. About ten more corpses are flattened against the floor and various surfaces.

By this time the television has broken, complete with burning smell and both the bath and the kitchen sink have sprung leaks. My alarm clock has been blown over by a gust of wind and the alarm no longer functions. I try to plug my radio into a socket in the living room and it ceases to function. All these bloody things to fix and work on Monday!

Havana Revisited, I think to myself... ✎

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MY GOD! - IT'S FULL OF LETTERS!

Eugene Doherty

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It was with some foreboding that I picked up the Tommyless Götter that had plopped upon my doormat today. Sure Mark could write up a storm, but could he edit? Would he get any contribs or have to fill a whole zine on his own? Tommy cast a long shadow but I think Mark has shone out in this issue.

“Tommy Who?” on the departure of the big man was masterful, witty, with pathos and pacing, in short all the things that I hate from Mark’s writing; too classy by half.

Damian’s article on his trip to Turkey was at times too akin to a “What I Did in My Summer Holidays” school essay. Despite this however I did find myself enjoying this. We have such a media biased view of the Moslem world and it was refreshing and enlightening to see a close up view of someone on the East/west interface who isn’t out to proselytise or castigate. It would be nice to see a follow up from him with this personal perspective in light of the recent resurgence of complaints of human rights abuse and the like from there.

“Oh Dr Beeching” by Eugene Doherty, what can I say? Such genius is not of this world, it is only on loan to us. Well then again, maybe not. Quite apart from querying the fine line between research and plagiarism is drawn, it was far too long for the space granted it. Mark may be grateful any pieces received but he’ll have to get over his indebtedness and wield the editorial shears with more vigour. It also deserves the prize for most inappropriate title of the year so far, but at least I’m not to blame for that.

(We also heard from Pamela Boal about this little article who was a mite upset at your jokes at the expense of stroke patients - humour a little too black when outside the confines of the health profession.)

“Scouting for Boys” didn’t work quite so well as I might have expected. It was almost great but something about it was too fragmented, too unpolished to make it more than quite good. I have obviously come to expect too much from the McCann fellow, but then again the extra effort of editing and production has probably affected the time for writing.

All in all then, a good take-over from Mark. Will Tommy be making any significant return to Gotter, will James ever get round to writing anything, either way it would be nice to see Mark making more of the zine and making it his own?

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. Murray Moore

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Tommy is learning that geography can be cruel. He mentions "the frozen wastes of Southern Ontario" in his cover letter.

Locate Toronto on a globe, half an inch south of the 45th parallel. Follow it west and you find yourself south of Seattle. Follow it east and you find yourself in Spain and Italy. Belfast is 10 degrees closer to the North Pole.

"It is minus 22 degrees centigrade - they never told me they'd be days like these," Tom, er Tommy, mutters. He is not the first immigrant to Canada to discover the reality does not entirely match the advertising. The railways tended to accentuate the positive when immigrants were wanted to populate the West, to become customers for the Canadian Pacific Railway and the Canadian National Railway.

Toronto used to be known as Toronto the Good, i.e. dull. The current image is Toronto the world class city. International surveys keep supporting this image by rating Canada and Toronto, respectively, as one of the best countries and cities in which to live.

Immigrants to Ontario have to adjust to having to buy beer and liquor from the provincial government through separate beer, and liquor, stores. Smoking in public buildings is illegal, which leads to die-hard smokers huddling in doorways in the -22 degree C. temperatures which Tommy mentions. Smoking in restaurants and bars is being restricted. And the howling of the sled dogs can be disconcerting, in the beginning. After a while, of course, the howling is background noise.

(Do you realise that almost two thirds of your letter is about the weather? I notice this trend too in Tommy's recent letters. A nation even more obsessed about meteorology than the English- who would have thought?)

Your "Scouting for Boys" is an example of why I actively seek to receive fanzines. Where else would I find this slice of autobiography? It has everything: sex, violence, politics, an adolescent being dragged reluctantly into adult society.

My impulse would have been to title it "My Personal Vietnam." Your choice of the undramatic, understated "Scouting for Boys" is better. Your story doesn't need bells and whistles. It commands attention on its own.

(I seem to spend all my time these days writing about how horrible men and small boys are - I think I must be turning into Mary Daly... Jesus what an awful thought!)

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Joe Nolan

As a regular reader of your excellent magazine and one aware of its mission to explore and inform on 'Rem Celtica' I am compelled by thoughts provoked by Volume Eight to write to you. I have neither the background insights nor expertise of a Gilbert or a Bauval, but am not unaware of the Cosmic Wisdom beyond astrology, being a Scorpio in the House of Aquarius as the letter date above will show (5 Feb. 1997)

It is because of this that only yesterday was I brought to awareness of another reminder of the First Time, the *Tep Zepi*, when the Gods fraternised with mere humans. This blissful First Time was invariably referred to as the Time of Osiris, Egypt's happiest and most noble Epoch; a view which I am sure Dr Jim Mallory (America's Celtic Researcher in Belfast) would agree.

Something stemming from the dawning of the Age of Aquarius sent me from the coded messages hidden in the text of Volume Eight to re-examine the Monico Texts anew. Several things began to come together; the Nordic Concept of the Twilight of the Gods (Götterdämmerung), the *Tráthróna an Diacht* (Evening of the Gods) (refer to *De Bhaldrathe*) and the 'Design for Life' (FEKAT) references to loss of a Leader caused me to more closely examine the Monocle papyrus. The Pictogram Heading of all sections from 1.1 to 2.9 is the same, is definite; and a pointer to that Glorious Past.

I saw at once that it was one of a related set of symbols or pictographs forming an ethereal, esoteric umbilical chord linking us all the entire way back to the *Tep Zepi*.

Those symbols are as follows:



I am sure readers will be able to add others in time. In the meantime I write to say that I think 'They' are all there, Osiris, Ra, Orion, Isis, Neghtlys, Khufu, Khafra and Rhem, and twelve thousand years on we must now admit *Tomai* to the pantheon, though we will continue to sorrow over his parting.

However, it is also now probable that:

1. Mark McCann's 'Scouting for Boys' contains instructional elements not quite in accord with the 'Design for Life' as revealed in the 'Pyramid Texts' and the Beubee Stone (refer *Journal of Egyptology* Vol. 2(32) 1934.)
2. That Damian Kearney was surveying the wrong Gavor since Cleopatra is (was)

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merely an incidental character in the Circle of the Cosmos; not a ma(i)n player in a glittering star cast, and;
3. The Bearded Eugene, The Big Ed., is also a bit *too* technical in his explanations of the Star Science of Life for Humanity. It *could* cause a schism.

However, I could be wrong about this, not having the experience or the Star Kissed background of Jean Francois Champallion, nor his Rosetta Stone for new inspirations, and look forward to learning the views of your learned readership. Long live the Götter!

(Any more letters from you Joe and I'm calling the police)

Tommy Ferguson

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Frankly, I'm not too sure what to say. Your editorial was touching, as well as far too accurate. I have kept the tradition of arriving late and drunk to parties alive and well in Toronto to good effect. I can only assume that you all knew I never had any intention of turning up for that last pint - there was far too much awkwardness at the door of Eugene's house that night to be healthy. Saying that we'd head off for another pint (Yeah, like any of us were going to be in a condition for a pint...) seemed like the easiest way out of that situation. Ah well, there is always May.

Damian's article wasn't that bad. I had impressions, after chatting to him on the IRC thing, that it would be overly dependent on scatological humour. As it was it was an interesting look at Turkey, although a bit more descriptive detail on the place and its customs would be nice. We went here and went there only goes so far - I should know, look at my "What I did on my 'olidays" pieces.

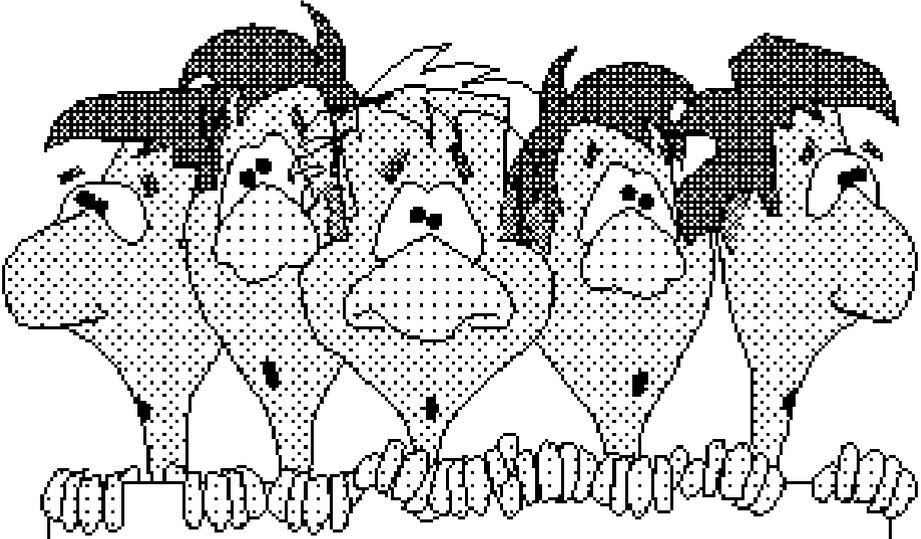
Eugene, my man, what can one say? A small slice of your life, essentially; irreverent, amusing and not long enough.

As for scouting for boys: I think it is safe to say that we've all been there. Mind you, the girls I met charged me a fiver... Well written and hilarious, as usual Mark. As for the Hot to Trot - well I suppose you really had to be there to know JUST how funny this is...

I'm sorry James, what was that you were saying, you'd contribute a piece for the next issue? Well done that man!

(A letters page so far up it's own arse that even the editors are loccing themselves... Expect a missive next issue from Mark McCann congratulating himself on his adroit editing of this issue's letters page. Well, what do you expect when none of you other bastards will write!?)

Götterdämmerung Nine



GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG NEIN

was produced by
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& (oh, what the hell!!)
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