



The Thirtieth issue of a sortof letter substitute, kinda thing, maybe weekly, maybe not, from:

40 Deramore Avenue, Belfast, BT7 3ER, Northern Ireland

E-mail: tferg@dial.pipex.com Phone: (01232) 293275

Web Site: <http://members.tripod.com/~Tommyworld/index.htm>

Available only via the net at the moment. See the colophon for the usual disclaimer. Thanks to Mark McCann for computer usage. Supporting Maureen Kincaid Speller for TAFF and Toronto in '03 for the 2003 WorldCon. This issue dated, already, 26/1/98

"It's all gone pear shaped..."

This was how one person described Northern Ireland's return to violence. Pear-shaped. That seems to be the only way to deal with the daily violence, security presence and tension that revolves around life - humour. "Sure, if'n you can't laff, what'll you do?" The politicians aren't up for much, the British and Irish governments currently have their own concerns and the wider international community, yeah well, the less said the better. But me? I've lived all my life, until this point, there. I'm away from it, there is distance and perspective - what do I think?

I think it is about time the Province returned to a state of violence.

No, there is no punch line; I'm deadly serious. I was born and raised a Catholic in a predominantly Nationalist, not Republican, area of Derry on the North West Coast of Ireland. I went to a 1200 strong, Catholic Secondary School and only met Protestants socially when I was about nineteen years old at University. My whole experience of Protestants, (there was no such things as Methodists, Presbyterians or Baptists, they were all Protestants), was negative. They did this to us, they did that to us and they will continue to do that to us. We were the underclass and therefore would have to fend for ourselves.

So we did. Sinn Fein set-up local political offices, they and the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP - or Stoop Down Low Party) got involved in local housing issues, education and social services problems. Sinn Fein helped people get the benefits they deserved, got involved in local planning and became what they are now: a traditional, Catholic based political party.

They also kill people on demand.

They aren't assassins in the traditional sense. Such killings have to be for a reason. There is no payment for such hits, although there will always be a debt. There were never any real out-cries by the local community or the police/security forces. The people that the Provisional IRA kill on demand, usually via sources close to Sinn Fein, were the local scum of the community. The rapists and child abusers; the drug dealers and pimps; the petty thugs who victimised old age pensioners and anyone, sometimes all, of those associated with them. This is a police service that we don't pay our taxes for, but I for one, would have gladly paid for them.

I don't, however, support Sinn Fein; never have and never will.

I am not denying what they do, or my support for some of their activities; hypocrisy is easy in Northern Ireland. Just because some people feel anger, hatred and at other times indifference to the presence of British forces in Ireland it does not mean that they are terrorists, criminals or even second class citizens. They deserve the range of benefits that a democratic society provides. They pay taxes, National Insurance contributions and provide local communities with their involvement. Sinn Fein represents a lot of these law-abiding taxpayers and, to a certain extent, does so extremely well.

One reason I abhor them is because of their history. Sinn Fein was born from a political system that was achieved through violent insurrection and Civil War. The society Ireland has today was reached by violence, which has been well documented as an unacceptable method with which to achieve political ends. I think that, at a lower level, this still represents what happens today in Northern Ireland society.

If someone from Sinn Fein wants something done for a constituent all they have to do is ask. The full bearing of the violent history of Sinn Fein is behind that request, as well as the legitimate political voice. They are not an organisation that you dismiss lightly, as you would some "concerned citizens for the right to walk down a pavement and not step of dog shit," groups that spring up.

I also think that this type of political society is important.

Some people in Northern Ireland, and I include both sides of the community, just don't accept any other arguments. Drug dealers. They don't care about the police and operate independently from any structured legal system. I'm not referring to just no-go areas where the police and security forces don't arrive as much as s invade. They operate in a judicial system that looks after its own. A community that protects itself because it doesn't believe justice can be served form a foreign power. Recent travesties of justice such as Guildford Four and the Birmingham Six illustrate this all too well. They and I would rather see rapists and child abusers and people pushing serious drugs dealt with accordingly.

Sinn Fein and the IRA do this exceptionally well.

Too well. A lot of innocent people have been maimed and killed over the years because of the, at times, comic incompetence of the IRA. Rapists' brothers being killed, people in the wrong house being beaten up and once, the right person in the wrong house. The IRA made a mistake yet still managed to hit the right person. Can I accept this as readily as I accept the other stuff they do? No, I can't accept it.

"But you just said?" That is one of the idiosyncrasies of my views on Northern Ireland: essentially schizophrenic and didactic at the same time. I can hold two obviously contradictory viewpoints in my head (it is okay for the IRA to kill child molesters but not British Soldiers) and, even though I see the contradiction, accept both viewpoints.

I'm not messed up by Northern Ireland, but my whole way of thinking is. I'm not sure if I'd rather lose an arm, or a kneecap, or to be able to hold a consistently anti-violence point of view. I'm not sure which is worse.

Best of '97

A list that I meant to include in an earlier issue but here's what I thought were the highlights of last year. Best Movie: Without a shadow of a doubt it has to be Grosse Pointe Blank. A film by John Cusack starring himself, Minnie Driver and Dan Ackroyd. A superb black comedy about a hit man going to his high school's tenth reunion and meeting up with the girl he ditched on prom night. Check it out, you'll thank me. Best CD: Dig Your Own Hole, by the Chemical Brothers. A techno-dance CD that justifies the Brothers' recent good showing on the Brit nominations (UK equivalent to the Grammys) with the astonishing single, Block Rockin' Beats. Best Book: Pollen by Jeff Noon. Mr Manchester himself does an amazing follow-up to Vurt. It uses similar themes as his first novel but develops them with a wonderful complexity and dazzling imagination. Yet to read his new one, but see below. Gibson's Idoru was a close second. Best Fanzine: Trapdoor by Robert Lichtman. Although Idea ran it a close second, Robert continues to produce a fanzine that defines our little niche in society. This is simply one you cannot do without. Best Software: FrontPage 98: Beta version. Responsible for all that is on my web site, a great piece of software though the latest upgrade to PhotoShop is pretty impressive, and well, Quake as well. Best TV: Frasier is still far and away the best thing on TV, although once again Seinfeld is right up there (and I still can't understand why British TV has not launched this series as prime-time, rather than leaving lolling about the schedules at 11.35pm.) And watch out in '98 for: Music: Catatonia, Spiritualised, Cornershop and Lo Fidelity All Stars with Goldie's new CD Saturn's Return also due for release soon. Movies: Jackie Brown and the all pervasive Titanic. Books: Ian McDonald will finally get the recognition

he deserves and Jeff Noon continues on his trail blazing way with Nymphomation. TV: Michael Hayes ain't bad but look out in the depths of Channel 4s am schedule for the amazing EZ Streets – if you liked Hill street Blues in the 80s, you'll love this 90s equivalent. Tape it, watch it and then rave about it.

And now, you:

Eugene Doherty e.doherty@virgin.net "(From TW29 -And finally, after the advertising spiel last week it now turns out I won't be able to make it to Corflu UK -)) you bastard, I knew that you'd do this! What about your live-in chum, Mark, is he making his excuses yet? Also what were the underlining bits, were they meant to be hyperlinks? grrrr! Eugene." ((What can I say? You'll have to make do with the witticisms from Mark and James, my Götter cohorts))

Bridget Wilkinson bjw@cix.co.uk "Hi Tommy, Thanks for your message. I had already come across Gotterdammerung from somewhere else, and had a peep at it earlier this evening. I don't know which mailer you are using (Internet Explorer 4?), but it came out as HTML, which was pretty off putting since I am using a text based mail program. (My web access is on a different machine). No offence meant, IE4 sends out mail as HTML without telling you that it has done it, I'm telling you because a lot of users are unaware of this... Good to see you around again. :-)" ((Yeah, very unaware of that. I'll put you on the Text list, let me know if that turns out all right. Anyone else getting this as an HTML version?))

Marc Ortleib mortlieb@vicnet.net.au "G'day, I got your e-mail and attachment, but, though my computer does agree that there is a file there, and that it is a Word document, it doesn't think it's RTF. My ClarisWorks, which deals with RTF, gives me a blank page every time I try to open the file." ((This gets worse and worse. I'm going to stick to the text/RTF versions for the moment, you can always access the back issues at my web site in html format if needs be. Let me know if there any other problems.))

Pamela Boal PJBoal@aol.com "Dear Tommy, your World has provided an interesting learning curve. I've not only found out how to download it in to a file I can read off line but also how to delete the gobbledegook, enlarge the text and print it out to read at leisure. It was good to read of your greater enjoyment of your family. If you will forgive such a personal remark, I think a more tolerant Tommy came back from Vancouver than the Tommy who went out there. Of course every parent knows that when their offspring get in to their mid teens we become stupid. Then when those offspring are in their mid twenties (for some parents it takes longer) we suddenly become quite intelligent and even get to have viable viewpoints." ((Yeah, took me a while to realise that my parents

were more important than me at the moment. I'm just glad I wised up in time – my Mum is 60 today and just out of hospital again. It's nice to be there for her.))

"I agree and think it proper that we differentiate between zines. Not in an adverse way but simple because a zine devoted to something like Star Trek has a very different flavour to a Fanzine as we know it. If you tell someone about a fish and show them a fowl they might be disappointed and go off both species. Regards for now, Pamela." ((Good point, and well made.))

Ulrika O' Brien UAOBRIEN@uci.edu "Hola, Tommy- Thanks for #29, to which more later, perhaps. For now, a few follow up remarks on the dialog about Usenet. To me, you say, in re the mistake Usenet of treating Usenet posts as articles, insofar as it places expectations on them that had no part in their production: "That is one of the problems yes, I do have this penchant for reading things which have a structure and organisation that corresponds with the English Language. Hey, call me picky about this, but it is just the way I'm wired." Over here, this is what we call a "cheap shot." By and large, RASFF posts do indeed have a structure and organisation that corresponds to the English Language, and claiming otherwise is dotty hyperbole. What they *don't* have in many cases, is organisation and structure that or responds to *an essay*. This is one of the ways in which they are different from articles and similar to conversation -- they are structurally informal. That's *why* it's such a daft idea to call them articles in the first place." ((My point, which I'm not making in any serious kind of way, is that if I looked in on RASFF now, at any of the threads, I'd be well and truly lost. My second point is that posts are made to threads and you have to open the whole thread, work your way through recent postings (which may be located on different threads) to find out what is going on. That seems like way too much hassle, even though I see why it is organised that way, even for something that I find extremely interesting.))

"But, as ever, suit yourself. I don't really see anything wrong with not liking Usenet, I just think that, as with most things, one ought not to dislike it based on misunderstanding or bad reason. Hell, at the moment I've been fairly fatally bored with rasfef, myself, so one wonders what I'm on about." ((Ulrika also went on to deal with a number of other aspects of the discussion which I find myself nodding at, not quite agreeing with, but hell it isn't a big issue. Thanks for taking the time out to write. I hear rumours you may be coming to Ireland - any truth in them?))

Valerie Westwood westwoodv@aecl.ca "Hi Tommy. Thought of you this morning as this is the weekend of Confusion. Guess what, right now it appears that the weather is even worse this year than last. I am not going due to other reasons. However last year I remember Susan (Manchester) saying that you were pretty quite on the trip down, and well just think what you are missing this year. Last night it snowed several inches and appears to be turning to freezing rain out there. Mike (Glicksohn) seems to go and get

through no matter what. Just a note of your Canadian links at Harris. Bryan Adams being from Vancouver and Neve Campbell (the babe I presumed you were talking about on Party of Five) is from Guelph, Ontario, her aunt was married to one of my brother's friends. Hope your weather in Ireland is much better." ((The weather is a lot better, but at times it seems like it is raining bullets Even the weather in southern Ontario sounds more appealing at the moment.))

((Next week the first of my guest contributions. Also another poser from Jim Mallory based on nearly a decade of research at the Queen's University of Belfast Archaeology department (and over a few pints in The Monico): Does each generation have a book which defines their time, which everyone had read and is something that defines an era? Suggestions welcome. More next week, see ya all then.))

IAHF: Luke McGuff, Randy Byers, Jack Weaver, Vicki Rosenzweig, Jo McBride

This is being distributed to a whole bunch of friends on the net, if you received this and would NOT like to be on the mailing list please accept my apologies for this intrusion and let me know so that you will not be bothered by further ramblings. If you know someone who would like to be on the mailing drop me a line.