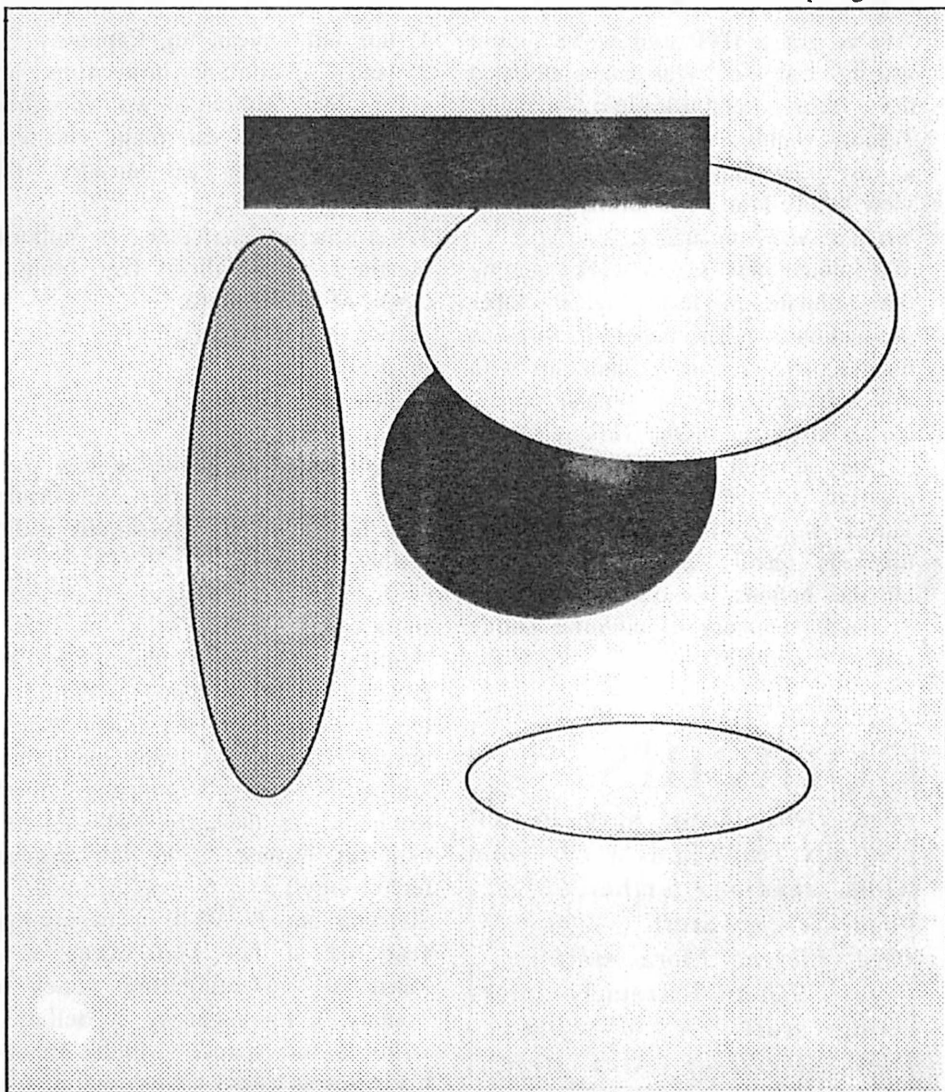


# GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG

Vol 1. No. 1

Spring 1991



- Can a murderer ever return to society?
- Guess what is happening to your tax money?
- On board the slow bus to god knows where...
- Finding yourself through the ninefold way.

# editorial

'We've got a DTP and we're gonna use it.'- was the cry as James unveiled his latest technological marvel. Tommy visibly swooned as visions of a vast publishing empire reeled into view before him. The ultimate fanzine writer's wet dream..

We immediately set to work creating the ultimate in technological paper productions. After many a tortuous nanosecond we finally came up with this missive for your persual.

It's an amalgam of the various talents of the editorial committee, Tommy's massive publishing experience (!), James' wonderful machinery (!) and hilarious travels and Mark pushing all the buttons, (who's buttons?).

A quick summary of editorial policy which is simple:

1. no, and I mean no, Capitals.
2. only chocolate hob nobs are acceptable (although we recognise Mark's right to eat plain chocolate digestives- though we consider this sick).
3. anyone is welcome at editorial meetings ( providing they bring a bottle of bushmills ).
4. er..
5. ah...
6. that is ...
- 7.

As you can see we had a few other policy decisions but, after a few drinks, thought they were too serious and/or simply crap.

## mark

Tommy had some ideas for this editorial which he typed in before he left. Ofcourse, as the lowly "button pusher" I decided I didn't like it and wiped it out. 'Vorsprung durch technique', as they say; (which I still maintain means: 'fuck you through technology').

So who am I? Well, a twenty-four year old sf fan who works as a journalist (no sniggering James or Tommy...), for a charity in Belfast. I write a newspaper which nobody reads, (or at least I haven't met anyone who has read it yet). I've always wanted to write an sf fanzine but never liked the idea of getting my

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**Page Two:** If we have to tell you, it's really not worth your while reading further.

**Page Seven:** Stuff

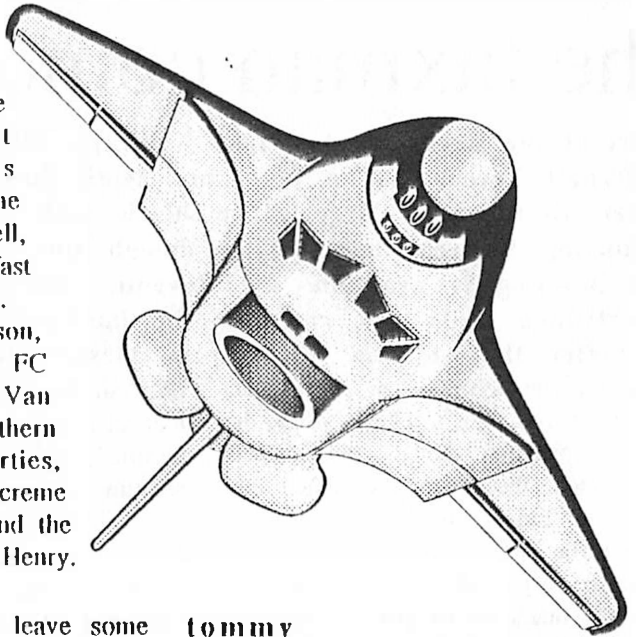
**Page Eleven:** More stuff.

**Page Fifteen:** Extremely interesting stuff.

**Page Seventeen:** extra stuff.

**Page Twenty-three:** the director of the fifty year plan for chess speaks.

hands all inky, so I never tried. This DTP lark has changed my mind although having to write interesting stories about the incontinent deadens your enthusiasm for the written word a bit. Oh, well, its something to do in Belfast on a Sunday afternoon... Likes: PKD, Ian Watson, John Crowley, Liverpool FC (Hail, Souness!), Van Morrison, obscure southern french trotskyite parties, potato bread, vodka and creme de menthe, The Pixies, and the travel letters of Hugh McHenry. james



I have to remember to leave some room for Tommy here. Its a bit strange to find me writing about myself, but I suppose it's all part of the game. As you can probably tell already this is my first foray into fanish writing. I am twenty-four and currently in my fifth and final (thank god) year of an M.Eng.Electronic Systems at University of Ulster at Jordanstown. I have been interested in sf for about ten years or so, though a few NICONs is about the limit of my fandom activities at this point. Mark is a long standing friend from too many years ago and I have known Tommy for about four year through Queen's University SF&F Society. Before DTP I had no great inclination to get initiated into the mysteries of Gestetners or stencils and one look at TASH is enough to put anyone off. Which brings us to Tommy's piece...

tommy

Well, it's me again folks. TASH is still alive and kicking (just...) but is continuing on its forced period of absence for a little while longer. In its place we have this wonderful marvel of modern technology; so good, you can read it! Whether it is worth reading or not is up to you, but hey we're kind of proud of it, y'know?

Me? I'm 23, a politics graduate working continued on page nine

#### sf fact

Her Royal Highness, the Queen Mother is an avid A.E.VanVogt fan. Her collection of VanVogt first editions, said to be worth a cool \$4 million, is the largest in Europe.

It's a fact!

- Tommy Ferguson sells his soul and joins the tax office...

# the taxman cometh

Start at the start and then take it away... My department of the (Infernal) Revenue is on ninth and tenth floors of River House. River House is a large office block with other organisations occupying thirteen floors. Even though the option to buy into the building is available the Revenue chooses instead to pay extortionate rents and rates to the landlords. Yet the 'renting is better than buying' philosophy doesn't end there.

Our computer system (hah, more later) is rented from ICL, a joke in itself, the photo-copier is rented, the carpets are rented, the blinds are rented and even the blinds on the windows are rented for Gods sake. If we had the initiative to get any modern technology like fax machines or printers they too would be rented. Rent city, folks, I wonder if the staff are considered rentable as well, by the hour perhaps. Which makes me a rent boy I suppose...

## Crash the computer

The Revenue loves its hardware, though. For example we love to play Crash the Computer. As the system was only set up in September of 1990 this has proved remarkable easy to do, although it is getting increasingly more difficult.

The simple uncomplicated method is to play silly buggers with the hardware: turning it on and off repeatedly early in the morning, or late at night; messing around with the connection cables and ports at the back of the terminal. Else generally knocking against it, completely accidentally, every so often. The

problem here is that this is only a localised effect with your particular terminal, and isn't useful to someone wanting to lose a whole day's work, especially on stats day.

## FBI database

Most of the processing is done overnight (the only bigger system in the world is the FBI database) so if you are able to crash the system early on, no-one will know what was done the previous day hence missing two days work. Neat, isn't it?

Concentrated search patterns are usually the best way, an overload of users or spurious phone calls to the help desk at computer centre are the current rave faves; all somewhat risky though. Last year all you had to do was search for the details of John Smith's taxes for the past five years and the whole shebang went down for 15 minutes.

## COP on

Of course, being an ICL system (I believe the Revenue's order for the system is the only thing that kept the company afloat) its all completely

incompatible. The Tax collectors use BROCS, the Business Review of Collection Services, the tax district use COP, Computerisation of PAYE; and the Schedule D tax people use

## 'a bad trip on LSD would be more preferable'

IRIS, Inland Revenue Information Service (lets get those acronyms in folks).

Can these systems talk to each other? Hell, they hardly talk to us, let alone a third party. The designers probably thought they were already too powerful and were frightened of what might happen. It's an immense system, with a massive database but it is still inherently stupid. Its level of intelligence is like trying to talk to Ian Paisely about the concept of a united Ireland (whoops, little bit of politics). I know that machines are what you program them to be but the incapacity of this thing reaches new heights and makes the Sinclair QL look like a 16 bit processing devil, with back-up Crays. But could we live without it? Do bears shit in the woods?

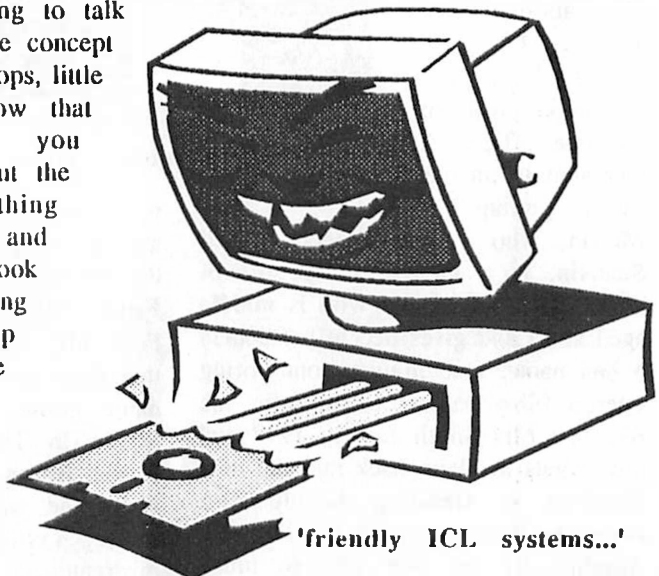
### Kissogram

Into this non-stable  
environment the  
Revenue has

poured the utmost dregs of society. I got the job through an advert in a local newspaper, it was stuck in the classified's section along side the part-timer cleaners and below the kissogram agency adverts. Even the very bottom of the pay scale was #1500 more per year than what I was currently earning though (Royal Insurance is the most profitable Insurance company in the Uk and now we know why, eh folks?). Given this I applied. Four months later (go on, count 'em) I was invited for an interview and four DAYS later they asked me to start. I mean four days..? This shows you how messed-up the Inland Revenue is.

### Stalin wasn't stallin'

My first week in the revenue was like a convention of Pee Wee Herman fans: a bad trip on LSD would be more preferable. Tony Strong is a character out of the mists of time and



'friendly ICL systems...'

Bob Cratchett's office. He's a big guy with a beard, glasses and a pipe and I pegged him from the very start as the most likely candidate for fannish traits.

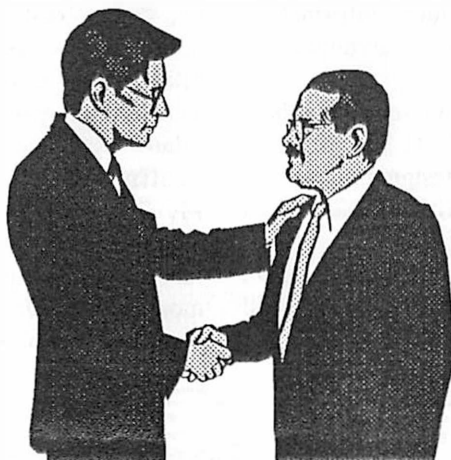
### Master Genius

He's the kind of bureaucrat who thinks Stalin was a master genius even though somewhat misguided. Every form that you can't read, every signature that's incomprehensible even to a electron microscope, every time a government telephonist transferred you internally to the fourth dimension it was someone like Tony Strong who was behind it. Every bad word you heard about the tax department was said about Tony Strong. It's no wonder he's also the union president for our office. A commentary on our times, perhaps?

Melvin, who I immediately dubbed Smelvin, is a greasy, slimy sort of bloke, the kind of guy who is middle aged at 25 and gives decent pensioners a bad name. One minute your poring over a filing cabinet looking for the 63p that Mrs Smith sent in 1947 and now wants to claim back and the next Smelvin is standing beside you breathing down your neck. His arms dangling by his side like so much spaghetti waving in the wind as if

there was a strong breeze asking you if you are interested in playing indoor football. It sounded to me as if he said are you interested in leather bondage and day old chip fat? When I turned round that first time I literally shuddered. He'd glasses that wouldn't go amiss as ports on a nuclear submarine, and the beady eyes seemed to recede away from them into infinity, the only way you could really see them was when they moved shiftily.

It was obvious he hadn't washed that morning and his eco-friendly nature was such that deodorants were a definitive no-no. Yuck, I thought, this guy is loathsome.



Tommy offers Smelvin personal hygiene advice

Smelvin carries a little notebook in the breast pocket of his shirt with a little scrubby pencil whose lead has to

be licked in order to make it write. He actually keeps notes on everyone in the office.

### Fuck off

Fuck off, was my initial reaction to this story until I witnessed someone's name going into the book like the Squire in *The Quiet Man*. He also writes letters to our regional office about the way he is treated in the office, giving times and dates of mistreatment. When he was hauled up in front of the boss for personal

hygiene reasons (spot the euphemism folks) and told to go home and get

## '...a past master of fiddling the flexi..'

washed he began to add other notes into his book: "Offered to lend football video to Mr Smith, ascertaining before hand that his children were respectful to private property, was refused." "Invited Joe Bloggs out for a drink on X night and was turned down." The next time he was hauled up in front of the boss for lack of inter personal skills (I hope you're keeping notes on these euphemisms, I will ask questions later) he was able to produce this documented evidence which proved that he had tried to be friendly and nice to people in the office. I seriously have my doubts about the personality, or lack thereof, of Smelvin.

### Viva Las Vegas

There is one thing though that he is a past master of and that is Fiddling The Flexi. The Civil Service is famous for its many and varied social and sporting events but the high art form of fiddling the Flexi is one of the great unrecognised talents of everyone and that's a lot of people. This ranges from Smelvin building up so much flexi, sick leave, holidays and Stress Leave so that he can take two months off during the summer to go to Las Vegas.

Other people in the office arrive at

7.00 am and leave at around 5.30 or 6.00pm and then take Fridays off, effectively working a four day week; granted those are four very long days, but still... This is all perfectly legitimate you must realise, that is in theory. When you consider that most of the bosses who examine the flexi sheets are not in until 9.00 and leave at about 5.00 then they are never there to note your absence or whether you're working or reading the beano.

### After the Beano

Then there is stress and strain. This is for people who work in the Inland Revenue in Northern Ireland because of all the 'stress and strain' of working in such an environment we get five days unofficial leave a year, no questions asked, for stress and strain. This can be extended for up to a month with sufficient evidence etc. (Not the stress and strain of being on the butt end of every single tax grievance on the planet (PAYE or not) but because we live and work in Northern Ireland). It's still hilarious until you consider its origins.

In the early 80's the success of the tax investigators and inspectors in uncovering tax frauds in social clubs

continued on page nine...

### sf fact

The infamous 'pasta' scene, cut from the final print of Ridley Scott's Bladerunner contained over 30 types of Sicillian pasta.

it's a fact!

●Mark McCann savours the delights of the local flea pit...

# theatre of horrors

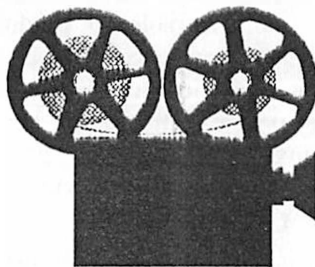
I went recently to see Coppolla's *Godfather III*. At the intermission, which was heaven sent, I stumbled blindly for the exit emerging from the Cannon Cinema bored, depressed and thoroughly pissed off and not just because the movie was so crap. I have now sworn before that great cinematographer in the sky never to darken the doors of a cinema ever again. Why? Well, there are several culprits who usually conspire to ruin a good night out and they all seemed to have been to see *Godfather III* that night. I would like now to reveal these evil people to you:

1. **Rustlers-** For some truly unfathomable reason, film-going seems to create a voracious appetite in people for various food stuffs. The sound of crisp and pop corn bags being opened all around can be deafening as the rustlers hurriedly try to satisfy their disgusting greed. Deafening too is the sound of open mouthed mastication. These people are not fit to live and should be put down immediately. If they are so fucking hungry why don't they go to MacDonalds?

2 **The Murray Walker-** This is an evil species of an altogether more subtle and deadlier breed. If you find

yourself sitting in front of one of these types- be warned! Uncontrollable psychopathic urges are inevitable. The Murray Walker has seen the film at least six times before and is intent on informing anyone who will listen, of all plot details and twists- just before they happen.

A vile sub-species of the Murray Walker is the 'Pseud' whose running commentary during arty french films is usually accompanied by knowing laughs and groans for no apparent reason.



3. **Snoggers-** I don't know about you but when I go to a film and pay my £3.20 I prefer to see any sexual intercourse take place on the screen and not in the auditorium. As is generally known, the snoggers, (who always travel in pairs), inhabit the back rows of any cinema, producing reproductive slurping noises as they make tactile examinations of each other's tracheas. Yuck!

A worrying trend among Snoggers



today is a move towards the front of the cinema. What next, I ask myself? Free condoms with every box of Butterkist?

4. Pervies- Along with the Pseud, the Pervy is the scourge of the arty french film. Sad, middle aged men in Seventies Marks and Spencer's clothing who make fumbling movements in the semi-darkness. All I can say is pass the Kalashnikov, Collette...

And if all those were not enough, there are the fucking adverts to contend with before the film actually begins- all three and a half hours of them. If you manage to avoid catatonia, you still have to cope with severe spinal deformation caused by the 'battery farm' seating arrangements.

Then there is the bogeyman of them all- the place too dreadful to contemplate... namely *the toilets*.

Surely a source of inspiration for a bladder-bulging Dante, the toilets are the final insult to the filmgoer's basic humanity. A ciggie strewn, crap-lined, enamel inferno that always contains a punter who has had one box of Butterkist too many.

This is as far from the glitter and romance of Hollywood as you can get, and I'm having no more of it. No longer for me the indignity of the local fleapit. I'm staying at home with my trusty VHS video and a comfy sofa. Anyone coming round to see *Total Recall*? ☞

## editorial

continued from page three

you know where. I've been responsible for too many societies and groups, being the BSFA clubs columnist for my troubles. I've ran a few conventions, attended a few more, belong to a couple of APAs one of which I hope to run in the near future and generally been an all-round wonderful fan. And modest with it. I like Guinness and lots of it, with Whiskey, and articles and letters of comment to the editorial address. ☞

## sf fact

sf giant Sheldon Perkins, author of the classic *Polaris*, once had a job on an Iowa pig farm as a testicle crusher.

it's a fact!

continued from page seven

related to the activities of para-military organisations was the reason for everyone working for the Inland Revenue being declared a legitimate target for attack.

## Slag

So what is it like to work in the tax office? Well quite weird actually. This might help to explain the nature and type of staff that the Inland Revenue ends up employing. An article on other people that includes yourself is a tricky thing to get round without seemingly to slag yourself off. I'm sure that I was up to it though, what do you think? ☞

•Disturbing questions on the rehabilitation of the offender...

# crime and punishment

Have you ever come face to face with a real life monster? A person who has done something so inexplicably evil that you have nightmares just thinking about it.

Bad situation you might think, but what if this 'monster' was a friend of yours? Someone you had known for at least two years and had occasionally went drinking with, but had no idea of what they had done in the past. This is exactly the situation I found myself in during August 1990.

One morning I was sitting in my office when I got a phone call from a reporter on a local Northern Ireland newspaper, the Sunday World. If you can imagine an anti-Tory Sun where rape stories and photos of topless models run alongside editorials calling Thatcher a 'whore' and a 'lying bitch', then you have some idea of what the Sunday World is like. Needless to say, it's Northern Ireland's most popular Sunday newspaper.

## Seedy gossip

The paper specialises in seedy gossip about poor sods who have done something in the past that they would rather now forget about. The reporters go to any lengths to dig up their shit. Recently a local school teacher hanged himself when this same reporter who

was now on the phone to me, telephoned him about his alleged homosexuality.

At that moment in the office, I didn't know who it was on the phone. The reporter said he was from 'Associated Press'-evidently he was too cautious to mention his own paper. He went on to ask if I knew that Peter McKenna, (I've changed the man's name), who worked in my organisation, had ten years ago raped, mutilated, and then strangled a young woman.

My first reaction was to laugh. Peter was probably the kindest, friendliest, most well adjusted person I knew. He would be the last person I would suspect of such a crime. I immediately thought this was a sick joke being played on me by some friends. I told him to, "catch himself on and fuck off", and then hung the phone up.

A few seconds later the office secretary, Maureen, came in and I told her what had happened. She rushed over to the door and closed it. She looked really worried and I began to have a sick feeling in my stomach. I could feel the blood rush from my face and I thought to myself, 'this is how writers describe their characters reaction to shock'. I had always thought it was just a hackneyed cliché.

'Should he suffer further?'

Maureen told me the reporter's story was true. Peter had done those things. He'd been sent to gaol for ten years and this was his first job since he had been released. She only knew all this because someone had told her about it a few months before. She warned me not to mention it to anyone else because no one knew, except the director.

For the rest of that day my mind couldn't focus on anything as I tried to reconcile the person I knew with this terrible crime. Even now I can't come to terms with it.

It was like meeting Dr Jeckell but being aware that he also could be Mr Hyde.

Maureen told me he had been declared mentally ill and that was why his sentence had been so short. The psychiatrists now said he was fit to rejoin society.

### Nagging doubts

Intellectually, I could accept this, but I had a continual nagging doubt- were all the smiles and kindness a cover for a very dangerous person underneath? How could anyone be certain?

I thought back obsessively to all the conversations I ever had with Peter. He had once joked that he had a lot of trouble in the past with his girlfriends. At the time I probably said something like, "everyone does", but now this comment sent a chill through me. How could he *joke* about his 'trouble' with girlfriends?

I saw this as a cold, uncaring statement from someone with no empathy for a

fellow human being. Would a psychopath say such a thing?

But was I giving him a fair chance? The more I tried to come to terms with it the more confused and depressed I got. The brittle liberal facade was cracking.

The guy had, as far as the courts were concerned, paid for his crimes.

Why should he be made to suffer further?

The toughest moment for me was having to meet and speak with him again and act as if I was unaware of his past. I had to watch my every word and try to act as

naturally as possible. Everything he said, I now examined for references to his past.

But the human mind is infinitely adaptable, and eventually I was able to accept him again- if not his crime. I'm not sure if this was a good or bad thing.

The situation for me dragged up some fundamental questions on the subject of crime and punishment. Can a man be separated from the crime he committed- should he?

### Questions

Should the rapist or murderer be punished for the rest of their lives? Should society aim for simple revenge, or the rehabilitation of the prisoner and his return to society?

And should we be told what type of person we are working with?

You could be working with a murderer right this moment and not know it.

concluded on page seventeen.

•James Mc Kee on the culture gap...

# Eines Tages in der Lift....

I recently spent four months in southern Germany, in Bavaria. During that time I gained an impression of the country and people. I wish to give you a small sample of the average day for a German and an Irishman. The day unfolds...

6.23 Woken by Siemens Integrated CafesGerat 2000.

6.26 Showered in the Siemens Electroduche. Temperature prefect at 22.6 Celcius as always.

6.34 Fruhstuck - Coffee (decaffeinated), Brotchen, Orangejuice

6.43 Breakfast finished, kissed Monica goodbye, wished her a successful day at the office. Took BMW out of underground garage.

6.44 Out on the strasse in time to avoid the 6.47 rush...

6:58 Arrived in office at Munich headquarters

7:00 Preparing for this afternoon's meeting with board.

7:13 Arranged deal with Sun Yo in Osaka. Turnover up by 12.5% per annum

9:45 Just have the time for an 11.5 minute coffee break. Discussing takeover of entire eastern European sector by Siemens G.M.B.H. with Helmut.

12:00 Worked out in company sports centre for 21 minutes. Vogel's game is getting better - must invest in the new Obermeister 1200 Turbo Flash

6:23 Sleeping

6:45 Hit clock for second time and the damn thing shut up.

7:15 Crawled out of bed. Terrible hangover from last night with the boys. Kicked the dog - it should learn to get out of the way.

7:20 Brenda said,"Why go in at all today, just 'phone in sick". I was tempted but I had already tried that one this week.

7:35 A good Ulster fry for breakfast. Nothing like eggs, bacon and soda and a cup of tea. Not in the mood for eating but put it all down me anyway.

8:10 Pushed the LADA halfway down the street before I got the bugger started.

8:20 Stuck in traffic jam on the Lisburn road - as usual.

8:45 Crept into office. Boss isn't here yet, thank God. Time to read the morning paper.

9:50 Undisturbed until now - gives me a chance to recover.

10:15 Cup of tea - finally wakened up. Oh no, here comes Bill - I suppose I'll have to smile at the bastard. He's going on about some contract falling through - some German company got

Kevlar/Magnesium Composite Squash Racket - should give me a 14.5% power advantage in those tricky backhand corner shots.

12:34 Lunch in company restaurant. Allgauer Brauhaus beer and weisswurst.

12:44 Back at desk early in time to tie into the States teleconferencing circuit.

12:53 Phoned Lydia at Hypertec in California.

13:12 Talking to Thomas from sales department, giving him a few productivity ideas.

13:45 Meeting with Managing Director. The Bremen division is over budget. Obviously those Prussians need someone from the Bayern Werks to help them. MD has selected me to go and sort it out for three days.

14:42 Caught a TGV to Bremen. Should be there in 1hr 27minutes. Phoned Monica and asked her to take 3 days holidays and join me there. By good planning I should be finished in time to go skiing in the Masif Central. Should be good...

19:00 Dinner with Monica in the Oval Restaurant. Beautiful oysters and a glass of good French wine and its back to the hotel to polish up the skis for the weekend. It will be perfect ...

**fact**

L. Ron Hubbard is an anagram of Joy Hibbert- the significance of which is yet to be fully understood.

**it's a fact!**

it. Bloody Krauts.

10:30 Got rid of Bill at last. Isn't it dinnertime yet?

11:00 Meeting with R&D - discussed Glentoran's result last night. Agreed it was a fairly dismal effort.

12:00 Out to the Crown. Hair of the dog should fix me. Chatting up Sarah.

2:00 Back to work. Luckily the boss hasn't spotted me yet today.

3:00 Meeting with Robert - receiver for our Strabane plant. It was much good anyway. Went out for a swift one with him.

4:30 Great - another day over. Wasn't so bad after all. Now if I can figure a way to give the Shields file to Brian - he's keen.

5:00 Down to the Rotterdam with Brian and William. Looks like another long session. The wife will be wondering where I am again...

8:30 Got my usual sausage supper from the Chinese.

9:00 Got LADA started and drove back home to Lisburn. Luckily no police about otherwise I would have to do a lot of quick talking. Brenda gave me hell about being out - says we're going to stay at her mother's in Portadown over the weekend. I feel an ulcer coming on ...

I hope I have managed to give you a slig ... of the cultural differences between the two countries. 'Depressing, isn't it ?' commented a fellow editor.

Ah, but in reality the Irish man would have been going down to the dole office and wouldn't have been one of the eleven gainfully employed persons in the province... ☞

● Seamus McKenna finds himself through...

# the ninefold way

When I offered to do this piece for Tommy, I don't think either of us quite knew what we were letting ourselves in for. It has caused me to have a serious examination of who I am and why I am this way. To understand my beliefs requires a knowledge of my background. I only wish to inform, not to preach.

I was born nearly twenty-five years ago into a Catholic family. I attended fourteen years of Catholic schools. There I probed the depths of that religion. My knowledge was deep with an understanding that was beyond my years. There was even talk of me becoming a priest. I was a good Catholic and proud of it.

## Adolescence

I left school at eighteen and spent a year at Belfast College of Technology. Although I had known people of other religions all my life, I had never really thought about any but my own. While I was at the Tech. I went through my adolescent questioning phase. I realised that Christianity was not essential for being a "good" person. I left the Tech an atheist.

I entered Queens later that year. I was happy carrying on as I was. Unfortunately, I began to exhibit the effects of a dreadful disease- manic

depression. I had been born with this curse but it only showed itself at that point in time. It is hard to explain the effect this disease has on someone's life; harder still when it is your own. The bottom fell out of my world. I once described myself as a mental wreck floundering on a sea of misfortune, searching for any rock to either gain safe anchorage, or dash myself to pieces. I had lost all confidence in myself and I needed a crutch to lean on. The drugs I was given were a help for a while. When they failed and were changed there

## kami

1. kami that is in gods in heaven,
2. kami that is in gods on earth,
3. kami that is in man,
4. kami that is in nature.

was a period of about a year when I reached to alcohol to support me. It failed, so I tried to kill myself, but that failed too. My psychiatrist told me that I would have to be strong; build a mental tower; be in control of my disease not it in control of me. Against this background I watched a

Japanese programme one night. I had always been interested in Japanese culture but had not pursued the interest for many years. I borrowed a book on Shinto. It gave me three things- Firstly, the concept of 'Kami'. Kami is that which makes something which is. It has four divisions (see box)

The first two divisions don't appeal to me - I will not exchange one set of names for another. Kami should not be destroyed needlessly. This applies equally will to trees, rocks, flies, sables and humans.

Secondly Shinto gave me a "mantra" which has great power in calming me. It is simply the first ten numbers in Japanese : HITO, FURA, ME, YO, ITSU, MU, NANA, YA, KOKONO, TARI. To use it I breath in via the nose on HITO and FUTA, our

on ME and YO, until each breath in or out lasts for the full HITO to HARI, about thirty seconds or so. It is possible to lose all sense of time, everything fades into the background even the words themselves. It is very relaxing and shows you the power within yourself. Finally the book gave a reference to the effect that Buddhism had on Japan when it was introduced.

### Types of Bhuddism

My aunt is a theologian and so has many books on different religions. I borrowed a book from her on Buddhism explaining the different types of Buddhism. The one that caught my eye is called Zen and it is

possible to argue that is not really a Buddhist religion. It did however develop out of Buddhism and so is called a part of it. Since that day I have tried to live my life according to the twin ways of Kami and Karma. The purpose of Zen is to pass beyond the intellect. It is not the question nor the answer that is important, instead it is the knowing of the answer. The goal is immediate perception, the intuitive awareness which come when the perceived and the perceiver are merged into one. The ability to do this is Achievement of Enlightenment.

It is usually achieved by reflection on Koans, mini parables if you like.

### Enlightenment

Day-to-Day life could be described as a path of non-violence an absence of useless thoughts and actions as an attempt to improve my Karma and

achieve Enlightenment. As yet I have not been able to follow this life fully but I am doing my best. Let me describe what should be done and you can decide if you could do it.

Non-violence means more than not hitting people. It also includes not dominating people by superior strength or position. It also precludes the use of words to hurt. Work on the premise of do onto others as you would have done onto you and never give offence if silence will do. It does not forbid using violence to protect you and yours but only as a last resort. A lot of Zen masters were experts in hand-to-hand combat but it was used

**"Cut off  
all  
useless  
thoughts"**

as a way of practising self control. The third Zen Patriarch, Seng Tsan, wrote: "Cut off all useless thoughts and actions and there is nowhere you cannot go."

## The Great Way

What he means by this is that we clutter up our lives with useless thoughts and actions and so lessen our ability to concentrate on the Great Way of Buddha. By stripping away all distractions we can refine ourselves and if in the process we encounter sadness or joy we can cry or laugh to our full ability.

What shape do these distractions take? The notion of good or evil, day-dreams, anger and resentment, stubbornness, needless judgements, unnecessary evaluations and conclusions, and self-judgements, which lead to conflicting emotions.

Where will all this take me? After death if I have lived my life in the best way possible I may become one with Buddha. If I need more refinement I will be born again as a different person with no knowledge of my former life.

## Mental tower

In conclusion, I can say that I can now face the world with a confidence that I have never known. My beliefs have built that mental tower for me. Lithium may give me my life back but it is my beliefs that allow me to live it.

Since I wrote this piece in the summer of 1989 a number of things have happened in my life. Firstly, I came to realise that I could not cope with

the pressures of life in the Medical faculty. I left on the 2nd. January 1990. It was the hardest decision I have ever had to make and the feeling that it was fated has helped me enormously.

I built up a wall of strength around me that stopped me falling to pieces. Now fifteen months later I have a new course to study- less intensive but equally challenging.

I am happier now than I have ever been. I meet any new problem secure in the knowledge that I have the strength to survive. ☞

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continued from page eleven.

I certainly have no answers to these questions. I'm not even sure of the purpose of this article- perhaps it is just to get something of my chest which I couldn't otherwise talk about. In Peter's case, the Sunday World published details about what he had done and where he was now working. In response, the women in the organisation demanded that he leave, which he did. They didn't feel safe around him and no one was going to stick up for him.

Has he to face this opposition for the rest of his life? ☞

## sf fact

Arthur C. Clarke is a noted gardener and has won prizes for his geraniums.

— it's a fact! —



● James McKee takes the ultimate trip...

# aboard the stygian depths

In this short piece I will attempt to give you, the readers, the flavour of a journey I have undertaken many times in the past. Forget the horror stories of the Belgrade- Athens run or freezing in Tibet - the ultimate travelling experience lies in the British Isles.

And so where can this experience be sampled? Northern Ireland is not a noted travellers stop, a few mountains, some nice scenery and the Giant's Causeway are all most tourists will mention if asked. Belfast is the main city of the Province - of about a 1/2 million souls all told. The journey of interest takes place by bus and in real terms is about 55 miles in length. It is a journey home to where I was born. For the last five years, though, I have lived in and around Belfast and have made the journey home many times.

Home is in the countryside, a renovated house nestled in a gap in the Sperrin Mountains about 5 miles from Maghera. ( Readers across the water may have difficulty locating this town unless they have a more than averagely detailed map). However, the bus journey to Maghera is even more arduous than the one I will describe and runs at such irregular times ( full moon and partial eclipse on the 29th of February only - not Saturdays ) and as a result is disregarded except in the case of

extreme emergency. So the terminus for the journey is a larger town - Magherafelt. This is situated approximately 50 miles east north east of Belfast. The arc described by the buses perambulations takes it through Antrim, above Lough Neagh and round to Magherafelt. It appears in geographical terms to be simple and straightforward - but not so.

## Squirming randomness

The least painful mode of transition is by car. On the few times I have essayed by this method, I have experienced vague longings to perform the usual random notions of the bus with a speed of 30mph and intermittent stops at out of the way sleepy villages. Luckily I am not actually driving, but a mere squirming passenger.

So, to begin. The transmigration usually starts with a walk to the bus station. There are two in Belfast - the nearest exclusively the haunt of the Goldliners - of which more later. The other, Oxford Street, is my more usual

point of departure. A dreary place, it took the powers that be 23 years to implement a recommendation that the buses should be turned round so that passengers could read the destinations signs. In the end, it is probably not surprising that the journey is as it is - perhaps in 23 years time...

The timetable is small and obscurely situated. It contains a meagre selection of times for the fateful Belfast-Magherafelt run. Once the approximate time has been chosen - don't be late you may languish here for several centuries - the bus can be boarded.

### Chaos theory explained

Albert Einstein once said that he believed that God didn't play dice. One trip on said conveyance would shake the faith of the stoutest believer. For the bus takes a random route which is dependant on time of day ( entrails of chicken etc. ). That great travellers almanac - the North Region Timetable provides scarcely more information - though by the time you have shifted through its tortuous tables, the bus will already have long since departed.

So once through the doors you are powerless - at the whim of vast forces beyond your control. More often than not this will be your undoing but occasionally a small surprise awaits. However this is a small consolation and a long period of suffering awaits without fail.

The journey through Belfast is energy

sapping but uneventful. The bus makes you believe that the average speed in a city is actually less than 12 miles per hour. Of course, this is sometimes considerably reduced, as when a traffic jam occurs. This is occasionally a time for merriment, depending on mood and your acceptance of fate.

It can be fun to watch the several hundred stationary cars in sight and contemplate that the people around you have spent several million pounds on these and are getting no further than you, who have only spent #3:20. ( A frightening amount in itself, of course. I can remember the days when ...)

The bus, of course, stops at every second lamppost as it takes the longest way out of the city, up the Antrim

### sf fact

A paternity suit held in a court in Mechanicsburg, Ohio, recently established that Ian MacDonald is the bastard son of Philip K. Dick.

It's a fact!

Road. The Antrim Road is a classic of strip development; a four or five mile long housing development which snakes up the side of the mountain toward Glengormney. Little old ladies halt the bus every few yards for the fun of it, since they never seem to get on. Up the long interminable hill, past the zoo. And so Glengormney is reached. I have made light of this part of the journey, because usually

my resistance and stamina are reasonably high at this point. I just try not to think ahead in an effort to keep my sanity.

### **Pedagogic stress**

This first leg can be made even more weary if the traveller is careless in his or her time of embarkation. The worst time period is from 3-5p.m. on a weekday. Then the traveller is subjected to dozens of screaming, running, fighting and cursing school children who board the bus like an assault team. They occupy the bus until Antrim at the very least and make the normal travellers occupations ( reading, listening to music) impossible.

Once through Glengormney, a small village swallowed up by suburbia, the traveller is subjected to temptation beyond measure. For at this point, the poor person cannot fail to see the motorway, the M2, the high road to freedom. The traveller is subjected to this sight ( it will not be the last) while the bus turns irrevocably towards Templepatrick.

### **King Lear**

The road to Templepatrick is good, straight and fast, though not for the bus. It is at this point, that the travellers nerves begin to fray. This leg of the journey is weary beyond measure. It is now that the false carefree facade is finally abandoned. The book or walkman is discarded during these long miles and the slow slide into oblivion begins.

also. For instance the person sitting directly behind you will invariably continue to play their walkman at the correct volume. The correct volume, that is, which will drive you mad. It is just too low for you to be able to make out the music for certainty but loud enough to drive you to distraction trying.

### **Class war**

The traveller is subjected to expansive views of traffic zooming by on the motorway close at hand. This torture stops when Templepatrick is reached. This worthless place is composed of a small village now smothered by yuppie housing developments. However, the horror engendered by this place is completely out of proportion to the quality of its housing, since it heralds the approach of a much greater evil - Antrim.

### **Suburbia Absurdia**

Antrim is a vast satellite town. It is located just off the M2 motorway and so, for some reason unfathomable by me, people wish to live there. It is hard for me to describe the depths of my hatred for this place. This hate is engendered by the very nature of the place and by the impediment to my journey which it creates. Antrim is a vile place - try to imagine every town planners' nightmare you've every experienced and you've got a pale shadow of it. Suburbia Absurdia. It is a bloated place, consisting of vast tracts of council housing and a vast incomprehensible one way system.

Small pieces of anticlimactic dual

The fellow travellers begin to grate

carriageway offer a dim hope of escape from the madness but lead inexorably back to the crowded, tortuous one way madness. These plunge you back into a Dante's inferno of 'exclusive developments' and 'desirable secluded residences' - an estate agents' playground.

### The case for contraception

The bus manages to cope with this with only a slightly circuitous route. It only takes a mere twenty minutes to traverse Antrim. I was originally tempted to call this piece the trans-Antrim sleeper - but a marginally better chance of sleeping is afforded by Heathrow's main runway. Of course the path of the bus towards the bus station at the centre of this nightmare is impeded at every turn by that most vile race - the Antrimmerants. They lie cleverly concealed at every second lamppost and leap out to hijack the bus at every opportunity. Typically they are accompanied by hordes of screaming brats of indeterminate age, fourteen baby buggies and enough groceries to keep Kurdistan fed for a week. It takes twenty minutes to load all this onto the bus and even then they stay on for 3 stops, at which point another member of the relay team begins. I keep expecting quantum effects to operate over these small distances.

Although the bus may take a mere 20 minutes traversing Antrim the knife can be well and truly twisted by a number of events. The first is the stop at Antrim bus station. Normally

this is of a 2-3 minute duration but can occasionally stretch to an agonizing 10 minute session. It is better not to dwell on these things. The other major disaster which can occur is having to change buses. The bus simply disgorges its passengers onto the pavement, many of who find it difficult to walk at this stage of exhaustion and leaves. The frightened passengers find themselves stuck in the middle of this nightmarish place on a cold wet night ( even in the height of summer it always feels like a cold wet night in Antrim ). They wait, ( for who would dare venture out into Antrim ) in the faint hope that another bus will arrive. It usually does, though never in a short period of time. It is almost a religious experience to see the relief of fellow passengers when a bus does appear out of the wet foggy gloom.

### Cardiac Arrest

The bus then has to cross the pit again to get out. I sincerely hope that I will never get stuck in a serious traffic jam in Antrim, minor ones having almost caused me heart failure in the past, and that my readers will remember me if I ever do.

And so the nightmare continues. Once the charabanc has coughed its way out of Antrim, we have a long straight road ahead of us. But a faster rate of progress - no chance. If the buses had to break the speed limits of 1911 to keep to the timetable, the drivers of today are certainly making up for it. So we continue to jog along at 30mph - unless of course, we encounter a

tractor.

More often than not these will be pulling some obscure farm implement. The relationship of bus and tractor has been one which has proved endlessly fascinating for me (mostly due to the fact that I am a captive audience). The relationship appears to be quite simple. The tractor and bus are both road vehicles and the tractor is usually slower than the bus - relatively speaking of course. Thus logic would dictate that the bus should wait for a straight piece of road devoid of oncoming traffic and then pass. However, it never seems as smooth as this. The usual obstacles (trees, hedges, bends, cars, eighteen wheel articulated lorries) are all impediments to overtaking which any sane person respects. However, the tractor/bus relationship seems to bear some similarity to the strange dog syndrome (lots of time, nowhere to go and plenty of sniffing ...). This ghost in the machine syndrome should be further analyzed and documented, or do human factors play a part? One fact, though, has emerged in five years of not so patient study - tractor drivers are acutely aware of the movement of the public conveniences.

sf fact

Peter Morwood is a well known fantasy writer.

it's a fact!

They only emerge at an exact moment required to cause the greatest impediment. Perhaps they and the drivers are in league, will we ever know?

### Sonambulant pop singer

At last, most of the passengers in a comatose state, we reach the Randalstown roundabout. This proves, as ever, a hope and a disappointment. The motorway exit to freedom looms large and hope builds - but is dashed on the rocks of the Randalstown turnoff. Randalstown is a sleepwalking little place. Nothing much ever happens here - an occasional bombing of the police station - nothing more. Sometimes a startling event takes place; a passenger embarks or a passenger falls out. More often than not, though, nothing happens and the bus makes a careless perfunctory stop. The mornings are an especially heart rending time for the Randalstown interlude. Often the bus does not stop at all. Andy White, the (in)famous local singer wrote of watching rain drip off a telephone wire in Randalstown. He was looking through the wet window at 6:30 in the morning. It is a classic depressive ballad, making the famine songs seem cheerful. Luckily I have never listened to this eulogy at said time and place, but if I decide to end it all...

Once out of Randalstown, we rejoin the motorway at its end. It almost seems fitting, somehow. This leads to about two miles of twisting hilly B road with no overtaking points (tractor

- Our regular column for readers' problems.

# dear uncle joe



Have you got a problem in your life which you just don't know how to solve? You do? Well, why not drop a line to Gotterdammerung's top celebrity Agony Uncle, Marshall Josef Stalin, former president of the USSR and chairman of the Soviet Communist party.

Each week Uncle Joe deals with personal traumas and family matters in a thoughtful and caring way. You never know, he could just help you. Now for this weeks postbag- a letter from Belfast...

Dear Uncle Joe,

I've been an SF fan for most of my life and have spent many a thoughtful hour engrossed in the works of Arthur C Clarke or Isaac Asimov. But recently I've become embarrassed about my pastime and feel very self-conscious about it. My mother complains that I don't go out often enough and that I'm turning into an "oddball" and that I'll go blind. Is she right?

Yours, Self Conscious. Belfast.

*Uncle Joe Replies...*

*Well Self Conscious, let me start off right away by putting your mind at rest. You are not an "oddball". Reading SF is a natural and healthy way for a young person to explore themselves and their relationship to the outside*

*world. You shouldn't feel guilty about it and you certainly won't go blind! I have no hesitation in recommending young comrades to take up their Dick's and read on.*

Dear Uncle Joe,

I'm the leader of a small island off the west coast of Europe. In the past things have been pretty good and frankly I couldn't complain. But recently it all seems to have gone wrong. People have started voting for condoms, divorce and woman presidents; the Roman Catholic Church is on my back; my personal profile has gone down the tubes and I can't retain an erection. Can you help me?

Yours, CJH, Dublin.

*Uncle Joe Replies...*

*Well CJ, I certainly sympathise with your predicament but never fear things are not as bad as they seem. Firstly, in this situation I always find that massive police repression is a wonderful problem solver. Round up*

drivers take note). Another twisting flat section joins this to Toome. If ever a town was aptly named - it is as good as anything in High Plains Drifter. Toome's only claim to fame is its bridge which is one of the few crossing points of the Bann river. Toome can prove to be one of the bus traveller's greatest trials.

### **Digress through technology**

A quick witted traveller by bus will of course choose the new fangled Goldliners as his mode of transport. These are new luxurious coaches on selected routes. They have everything you could wish for - straight routes along the motorway, avoiding all inconsequential towns -

Templepatrick, Randalstown et al, and a fair turn of speed, stereo system, alloy wheels, turbo etc. Bliss, I hear you say, all the travelling ills conquered at a stroke. Not so fast, friend, for the traveller who fails to make an absolutely thorough search of the timetable will be caught out by the agonizing 10 minute stop in this benighted place, Toome.

### **Galactic upheaval**

Toome, has one redeeming feature - by previous painful experience you there are only approximately 15 minutes of the journey left - contingent on getting through Castledawson, weather conditions, meteor showers, galactic upheaval... Any of these ( or no readily apparent factor ) will at least double your remaining sentence, or worse.

So at last we are on the home strait.

Castledawson will be reached in 3 miles. This is a single street town of length one mile. The slightest difficulty in traversing this street is invariably disastrous. All sorts of mundane and trivial factors can account for this, for example, the normal triple parking or 18 wheelers snogging on Main Street. Luckily, the powers that be have decreed that a BYPASS shall come to be ( after 15 years - could be another 15 before it's finished).

So eventually through and its only two miles to the destination, Magherafelt. Magherafelt has chronic trafficitus problems and is in need of at least 15 heart bypass operations, but with these N.H.S. cutbacks? At this stage I usually couldn't care less. Its just lucky that I not claustrophobic. At last the bus reaches Broad Street ( never broad enough, though) and I stagger off.

### **The end is nigh**

I'm almost at the end of my journey now. I live in the countryside - miles away from all this traffic; around ten miles to be precise. This last part is smooth and painless, by car.

It is not my intention to put you off public transport but merely to educate. I have made this pilgrimage many times and would be interested to hear about some of your great bus journeys. In the next issue I hope to cover another great bus journey of the world - Magherafelt to Belfast. Bye for now.



*all those you have a particular dislike for and have them shot. Secondly, take it from me the Roman Catholic Church is all talk and no action. A few dead clerics never hurt anyone. Finally, you shouldn't worry about what people think of you. If you have respect for yourself and your work that's all that matters.*


Dear Uncle Joe,  
I've moved away from home, lost my friend and am now working for peanuts in London. I'm a keen SF fan and also enjoy some avant garde music (as well as the odd box of wine). My problem is that woman think I'm too immature, sexist, foul smelling, pot bellied, short-sighted and talk gibberish all the time. Is there any way I can solve these problems, and meet someone who shares my own interests?  
Yours, DK, Hook.

*Uncle Joe replies..  
No. Fuck off...*

**Have you any problems?**

Well, write to Uncle Joe, the only agony uncle who tells it dialectically. (And the editorial team needs a good laugh anyway...)

Unfortunately Uncle Joe cannot enter into any personal correspondence as he has been dead for over thirty years.

Send all letters care of the editorial address, marked for the attention of Uncle Josef Stalin. 

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