

LAWKIT

Life
as we
know it

two



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England, Their England
Jude Collins

Austerity in the Air
Paul Reddan

Monks and Materialism
Ericka Lynch

Smuggler's Run
John Bourke

Is this the end
as we know it?
Andrew Boal

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Life as we know it.

A word from the editor

As with any creative effort, it is the sophomore attempt that can prove the hardest. After the greatly appreciated positive reception to Lawkit One, we were already trying to figure out how best to follow up. And, as you'll have figured out, this is it.

So the alignment has been tweaked, the margins tidied up, the pictures captioned, and the learning curve further inclined. But the content guidelines remain broadly the same - with pleasing results. We even have a contribution this time around from - whisper it - an actual broadcaster.

Thrilling stuff.

In fact, some of the submissions for Lawkit Two threw up an interesting conundrum. Whilst the Lawkit, as a publication, is a strictly neutral podium, columnists are encouraged to not only speak with authority in their writing, but to take a position to assist them in giving the most compelling accounts of their chosen subject.

As the editorial 'team', we do not take a position, which should allow. Of course there are limits to this, as set out in the guidelines: if it is blatantly obvious the author has merely set out to offend, or is arguing something purely for the sake of it (not just to provoke thought, which is separate, to my mind) then it will be filtered out. As editor, though, I was particularly challenged by a couple of the pieces which came

across the desk this time. I was tempted to enact the filter, but then held back. Whether issues of legality, prejudice or belief, we should - as a publication - leave no stone unturned in our discussion of Life As We Know It. If the three taboos for polite conversation are money, politics and religion, and we had already published two of those, then the third should not be avoided either. And if something should provoke a particularly strong reaction in readers, well, that should act as encouragement for they themselves to submit a repost for future publication.

Comment is, after all, free.

England, Their England

by Jude Collins

I discovered England in the summer of 1963, which wasn't really too late for me, whatever about Philip Larkin. I was twenty years of age and on night-shift in a pea-factory in Huntingdon. Every morning around six, the night-shifters would be bussed out to the old army camp where we stayed, and I remember the surprise of the Cambridgeshire fields in the morning sun – so big and civilised, pale green and generous, not a bit like the cramped, violent-green fields I'd known all my life in Ireland. Then I'd open my newspaper and read more details of the Profumo political scandal that was raging

at the time: Tory MPs and Cabinet ministers, call girls and birchings, pimps and naked men in masks, suicides. All sorts of depravity, festering away under the gentle green surface of English life.

In the 1970s, living in Newcastle, I had a similar epiphany. I had always followed English football via a weekly fix of Jimmy Hill and Match of the Day. Now I could go to St James's Park once a fortnight and see the real thing. The difference was amazing. Match of the Day had been all Jimmy the Chin quips, good-humoured crowds and applause for the skill

of the players. Here at St James's Park, and probably most football stadiums throughout England, the air was ripe with obscene chants and racist abuse of the few black players who had made it into the First Division. The viciousness of it all was sort of frightening.

It seems to me the English are a people who do a lot of wrestling with their inner demons. Maybe that's what makes them so keen on rules and rituals - queue-forming and royal weddings - anything that might be used to keep the wild side in check, or at least out of sight.



Which maybe explains the British Empire. For a number of centuries the English people told themselves the beast was out there, not within. So they searched the globe for wild places and people; and when they found them, they clamped England's civilising rule onto them. And for a time it seemed to work. The peoples of the Empire took to cricket and covered their loins and formed more or less orderly queues - became,

in fact, as English as could be expected in the circumstances.

But oh dear, it couldn't last. One morning the people of the Empire woke up and decided they wanted to organise the way they lived for themselves – even if, to English eyes, some of their organisation was odd and outrageous and, well, unnaturally un-English. (David Cameron is holding his breath and hoping the wild people of the north of Ireland will go

on keeping their wildness out of sight if not out of mind.

So now, finally without an Empire to distract them, the English people have to look at themselves and sometimes, hey, it's OK. Like the way they were when Wills and Kate got married recently – neighbourly and street-partying and teary-eyed. Sometimes, though, what they see makes them feel a bit scared. Like when something horrible is done to Iraqi



Austerity in the Air

by Paul Reddan

prisoners or a black schoolboy gets stabbed to death or two little girls get murdered by an ordinary-looking young school care-

taker. “That’s not us!” the English people tells themselves. “We disown such awfulness – we’re English and we don’t have an id!”

Face it, chaps. We all have one. Your id is the same size as ours and everyone else’s. Admit it and join the human race.

Journalist and retired lecturer Jude writes daily on his blog. How he fits it in with appearing as a commentator and contributor across media platforms, alongside his habit of running long distances for pleasure, we can’t quite figure out via <http://lawk.it/judecollins>

“Maybe they won’t notice” I think, as if trying to convince myself that double the baggage allowance would somehow be acceptable by the discerningly watchful eyes of Michael O’Leary’s minions.

The bag was definitely overweight, I know this, but I think that maybe if I carry it with the perceived strength of several men then they won’t spot me amble slowly through the departure gate seating like a pupil who’s elected to bring all of his books to the first day of school somehow under the illusion that

it’s considered mandatory.

Initially I take solace in the fact that I’d managed to ‘fool them once’ (I know, the shame on me part was inevitable really) on the way over with a bag made up of what I’d decided were my surplus to requirements ‘winter clothes’ and beautifully written (I’m sure) economics literature which for the three and a half weeks I spent at home went completely unopened. Ironically, when I have one of those handy handheld analog scales handed to me 10 minutes before I arrive at

the airport I proceed to use it, take note that my small but densely populated bag actually weighs a ridiculous 18 kilograms and then add the alleged solution to the side pocket of the increasing problem.

One of the first lines of defence at any airport for those without intended hold luggage is the security check. People are already struggling to fill small plastic bags with their holiday liquids in a vain attempt to avoid having to buy sunscreen upon their arrival in *insert touristy Spanish destination here* when they have copious



amounts of the stuff fermenting in their bathroom cupboard at home. The coat, keys, phone and change go in the tray followed by the laptop and belt and I anxiously send my bag down the metal rollers to be scrutinized for dangerous liquids by the odorous x-ray monkeys. I imagine what it would be like if they installed scales on the conveyor belts so they could pre-emptively decide your fate before you've even had a chance to try the new Hugo Boss aftershave or see if they have any free samples in the alcohol section of the duty free. Success! I'm

fully aware that my bag does in fact contain liquids NOT confined to designated liquids, but I refuse to pay the £1 for a poxy sandwich bag I could have nabbed from the kitchen cupboard before leaving the house.

Its small victories like these which put skips in steps where there were no skips before.

My bag struggles out from beyond the horizontal flaps unscathed and unimpeded. My Nivea deodorant and half full (I'm feeling optimistic at this point) bottle of contact lens solution remain with me for at least a few more hours. Potential Terrorist 1, Airport Security 0. This triumph puts me in good stead for stage 2 of the anxi-

ety parade so I shuffle over to the recently introduced Starbucks, which astonishingly doesn't accept its own loyalty card and I start to regret paying for one last week for the primary reason of using the bloody Wi-Fi, and tuck into some half melted Easter egg and a cup of their finest (cheapest) coffee.

The hour of judgement draws ever nearer and with half an hour to go before the alleged departure time, which of course is always half an hour earlier than it actually needs to be but subsequently guarantees (almost 90% of the

time apparently) the discharge of an inane fanfare through the already overused tannoy, I make my way to the departure lounge. At this point I start to remember my cycle to the train station before my first flight three and a half weeks ago and how bloody heavy my bag is. I struggle on behind pensioners and unbalanced toddlers. The head goes up and the posture corrects as I turn the corner towards the gate and I try to ignore and do my best to avert the wandering eyes of airline staff wanting to get a good gawk at oncoming potential money



bags (pun intended). I hope they haven't spotted me and added me to their blacklist. I sit down and start reading because the queue is too massive to join just yet and I'm not in any hurry to start sliding my bag meanderingly across the frictionless carpet impatient passengers have decided to queue on. The announcement comes and people start to move forward. I still



wait. I see a guy in a bright orange bib start to attend to the queue and pre-emptively tear tickets to save time (as if they need to! They give themselves half an hour extra and they still have to rush). I look around and see that other people have similarly sized bags to mine but with the addition of wheels. Would wheels make a difference? They would on the carpet. The shape? Maybe my bag isn't enough of a cuboid! I hope that the orange vested man will continue tearing tickets so that I can shuffle unnoticed down the stairs once I get within

leaping distance of the desk and far enough behind the person in front that I would go smoothly unhindered. He stops ripping tickets. I continue to read in the queue so as to appear nonchalant with a 'forget about it' ethos like I completely know what I'm doing and am well aware of the baggage restrictions they're domestically and internationally loathed for. The queue starts moving fast now and I can't push my bag with my foot any more as the strength in my ankle can't overcome, at speed, the restricting nature of this ridicu-

lous carpet. I lift the bag a couple of feet again and again until it seems unavoidable to return my book to my bag, get out my boarding pass and passport and lift my wheel-deficient mobile home onto my shoulder.

We move steadily closer to the desk and I choose the side where the attendant's view of my bag will be obstructed by my calm and composed frame. In actual fact he was of no threat whatsoever, as they had employed a member of staff whose chief task was to visually discriminate against people based

on the size of their bag and then filter them from the group into a resentful assembly of disgruntled passengers gathered round a measuring cage. She is foreign which actually makes me more annoyed. I suddenly feel like I should have every right to fly out of my own country with my own national airline with whatever damn sized bag I want to without her intruding in on my exploits. I don't reveal this to her but instead helpfully do as she instructs me.

I try and shove my bag into dimensions it clearly isn't and

although I'm adamant that I could make it fit she makes no haste in announcing to me "sir, it must fit comfortably". Why even bother bringing hand luggage at all? Michael O'Leary would clearly rather it if we had no possessions whatsoever. Why don't we just carry the essentials to survive the night; a tooth brush, our wits and a small coat in case it gets chilly. They might just about fit 'comfortably' in.

Before I know it I've handed over my credit card without even being able to consider my options (the truth

is I have none) and am suddenly €35 lighter and filled with resentment for both the callous women bundling me down the staircase and the superfluous books I naively left the country with almost a month ago. I imagine that they probably don't even have enough room in the overhead lockers for my bag anyway regardless of its size but still have no problem relieving me of my money before it even gets a chance to pose a small problem when those of a horizontally plentiful nature aren't even provided with a second glance or a cage

Monks and Materialism

by Ericka Lynch

to measure themselves in. I console myself with the fact that I don't have to carry my bag any further than the gate and that if I'm lucky I'll get the responsibility of opening the exit doors should people require sweet respite from the mile high market of endless lottery cards, smokeless cigarettes and

extortionately priced mini-Pringles tubs being brandished in their tired faces. Is it too much to ask really for somewhere to put what possessions you are allowed to bring on the flight instead of merely a blue slab of plastic masquerading as the seat in front? Or even that they could afford an un-molested

safety procedure card which is held in the aisle beside you by a member of the cabin crew flamboyantly telling you how to react after a loss in cabin pressure. I sit back blankly in my seat and enjoy the leg room. At least I know I'll get out first in the likely event of us landing on water.

It all started with lipstick.

Think Bronze, Cherry Pie, Strawberry Dream. A whirl of arbitrary, oddly named cosmetics that either belong on holiday or in your digestive tract, tumbled before me.

And then it happened. It was an innocent, harmless reaction: perhaps to a noise, or a frosty blast from the air-con or the giddy outburst of a joyful toddler. Regardless of the cause, my cosmetic contemplation was broken, and I made the mistake of looking up. A veritable seething sea of products accost-

ed my eyes as I stood in the "girly aisle" of Boots. I was overwhelmed. Thoughts of the pending night were violently dislodged as the tsunami of colourful adverts bowl me over with their siren's call of painted beauty.

Things I didn't even know that I needed to make my life complete have suddenly become illuminated like the Vegas Strip. My hair can become straighter, my lips fuller, my hips thinner, my social life more exotic, my friends truer if I just give myself over to this glittering Oz of celebrity studded products.

I feel my legs slowly start to turn to putty as I stare into the abyss. Oh the horror! The horror! I feel the riptide pull. Can I ever go back to humanity after gazing upon such temptation: the dark beauty of product placement?

Stunned, as any victim of war would be, I numbly battle my way through this materialistic sludge, somehow purchase my necessities, and stumble out the door. The free air hits my lungs. I have escaped. The authentic glow of honest sunshine warms my face. Full of self congratula-

Despite spending a significant volume of the last few years living like a modern-day Lord Henry Wotton, Paul has already achieved an undergraduate first, and a masters from Cambridge. Meaning that despite his wild child days, he's almost certainly going to be a banker. And we all know what that means.

tions I counting myself among the likes of Odysseus at overcoming such a deadly call. Per my natural over dramatic tone, one may postulate this is my first bout with materialism. No, I am not Amish, fresh off the farm. I too have been raised in the Madonna culture of “a material world”. But somehow lately I have developed an arsenic-like reaction to the noise around me. And by this I do not mean merely audible noise. This clamour is the noise of anything that over clouds my brain with its demands for my attention. And recently, this noise has become deafening. However, it is not the noise of a sudden blast. The sound barrier has not been broken to shock one into a stupor. It has been a

gradual increase of volume, at first so subtle as to not be noticed, only an annoyance to be spoken over. But the volume has now reached and eleven on dial. To this I say shut up.

I now oddly find myself walking busy strips and audibly shushing the advertisements around me. I long for a quite monastery, overlooking an alpine lake where the likes of Lady GaGa and Katy Perry would be burned on the sanctimonious altars of silence. To breath air unpolluted by whiffs of McDonalds or KFC, and not feel the pressure to be in a dither for the sake of something to do. But even at this, materialism is not the evil. It is the aftermath of noise that kills.

Ericka Lynch is a displaced Yank, but don't hold it against her. Now located in South Belfast, she passes much of her time laughing at awkward moments. She is also fond of a soapbox and disarming sarcasm.

Our identity in our own noise. We cannot silence ourselves for fear, a fear that if we stop making noise we cease to exist. To this, I call for a cultural revolution: stop revolving. Just shut up and sit still. Then we might actually start to regain our hearing once again. What are we missing when we are missing silence? What do we fear in stillness? Have our own thoughts become so dangerous we now purchase them from advertisers? Remove the safety and step into the silence of our own undiscovered countries.

I long to be deafened, not by a product's call, but by overwhelming stillness. Let the silence begin so we can hear what truly matters

Smuggler's Run

by John Bourke

It was early in the summer of 2007 and my engineering course at Queen's required me to gain practical experience in the form of a placement. Many of my peers opted for a year out however not wanting to extend my course to five years I chose a summer placement instead. Living in Co. Cavan at that time I had managed to secure a 4 month job with a consultancy in nearby Co. Monaghan. In anticipation of the daily commute to and from this placement, as well as any sight visits that I would be involved with, I decided it was a good idea to buy a

car. The excitement of buying your first car is one which a young man never forgets. The advantage of my student address in the north was the considerable price difference in the used car market and enabled me to buy a fairly decent set of wheels. I used my student address in the north to register, tax, and insure the grey diesel Megane and everything was going swimmingly. After all, I didn't want to buy a southern reg. car and have it in Belfast.

The daily commute to work involved driving from Kingscourt to Castleblayney through

a town called Carrickmacross. The road between the latter two towns was straight and open making it a common route for police presence but thankfully I was aware of this and regularly avoided speeding on it. The route between Kingscourt and Carrick wasn't as common for police, and one I knew well having travelled it for six years to get the bus every morning to school.

It was a dry summer's day in July and I left the house for the thirty minute drive to work as usual. After a couple of miles the bends in



the road gave way to 'the hill' which then opened up to the wider flat portion which was one of the useful spots for passing lorries often slowing things up. It was also a suitable location for any checkpoints whenever the police or customs had some work to do. This particular morning happened to be one of those days and as I descended the hill I could see hi-vis jackets and a couple of cars ahead. "I hope this doesn't make me late for work", I thought as I slowed down to a stop at the check-point. I could see they were using equipment for dipping car

fuel tanks, and figured I was safe enough as I always filled up with genuine diesel and not the 'cheap illegal' type.

Living in a border county, you hear all sorts of theories of people using alternatives to mainstream diesel, and the different colours it came in; green, red, and so on. You also hear stories of how the colour can be extracted to make it look like the genuine white stuff, such as putting a loaf of

bread in a pair of tights and filtering through it.

The Irish Revenue and Customs were (and still are) active in border areas in all things related to alternative fuel and smuggling. Another major issue in border counties was people with addresses in Ireland driving UK reg. cars because they were cheaper to buy and in particular the road tax was on average a third of the price. It was the job of the customs to

catch such people and insist they import the car officially and pay the vehicle registration tax (VRT).

I was aware of these things and felt reasonably content as I wound down the window upon the request of the female customs officer. I thought because my car was diesel they would 'dip' me, however she asked for my driver's license instead. This is where the trouble began. My licence was Irish and although this was perfectly legal, this prompted her to ask why I had a northern car. Rather than tell her I was working as an en-

gineer for the summer, I chose what I thought was a better answer and said "I'm a student studying in Belfast". Which was perfectly true. However, this answer did not make her happy and I was told to pull over and park the car at the grass verge on the left. I then learned that according to customs an Irish student is not permitted to drive a northern reg. car because their parents' southern address is still considered as the permanent place of residence. This was something neither I nor any of my friends or family was aware of. My heart sank.

I was then given a written notice and told I had seven days to import the car, pay the VRT and get Irish registration plates. What made the notice even more personal was the lady writing her name and number on the notice before saying "Ring me when you have it done". Young men sometimes joke of how they'd like a policewoman to give them her name and number on a piece of paper, however this was no joke, this was personal.

After receiving this bad news, I took the piece of paper and drove on to work, arriving half

an hour late and sheepishly informing my boss that I had been stopped by the customs. I then decided to ring my father to update him on the situation; he was surprised but reassured me that we'd sort it out when I got home. Upon checking the relevant website online I discovered the VRT would cost the princely sum of 3200 euro. Needless to say, it wasn't a productive day.

Over the next few days, my father and I drafted a letter of appeal to the Revenue; this would at least buy me some time. After this was complete, I kept a copy

of the letter recipients' name in the car should I be questioned. Fortunately, it was a couple of months before we heard back and I had finished my placement at that stage; however the issue had not been resolved - the Revenue people understand my situation but stuck to their original statement ordering me to import the car.

It was now the winter of 2007, and we responded to this with a second letter of appeal. This had the effect of not getting a response for several months, which in the meantime I was fairly content

with as I was studying the final year of my Masters degree and had more important things on my mind. Finally, in May 2008 the reply came. The 'Revenue people', as we now called them, were decently apologetic, now being more sympathetic both to myself and to the small print in the law that had caused me this frustration almost ten months ago. Their final word was that I was not allowed to drive the car across the border (i.e. in the south) until I was no longer a student and was working full-time in Northern Ireland. By this stage,



I had secured a job as a structural engineer (post-graduation) with a planned start date of September. I had also plans to be out of the country on a three-week trip to Brazil and this would work out well that I wouldn't be around to drive in the month of June, however still posed the problem of the rest of the summer. In the meantime the letter

was replied to agreeing that the car wouldn't be driven in the south until I was employed full-time in the north. In order to keep this law-abiding promise, I started my employment immediately after graduation in early-July, completing a week's work and then taking the rest of the summer off until my original official start date of September 1st.

I had overcome my battle with the Irish Customs, and apart from the cost of a few stamps and envelopes I retained my car with NI plates without forking out four figures. I haven't heard or had any trouble since from and regularly make trips across the border legally and guilt-free.

John Bourke does very inventive things with concrete. That might not sound interesting to you, but it has taken him across the globe and shows no sign of slowing down. He also bangs the drums loudly and can whistle so piercingly that dogs howl.

Is this the end of the world as we know it?

by Andrew Boal

There is a long and distinguished, if rather wasted, history of people reading the Bible and other holy books and trying to predict the end of the world. The latest date which we are assured by Harold Camper is the real date when the dead will be raised, is Saturday 21 May 2011. So I'll see you in heaven then.

Or will it be yet another false prediction of the end of the world set to distract us from getting on with life?

The answer is probably. Not necessarily, but probably. The chances

are that you and I will still be sitting here on Monday 22 May 2011, and we'll be laughing at the next person to predict the world will end on a given date.

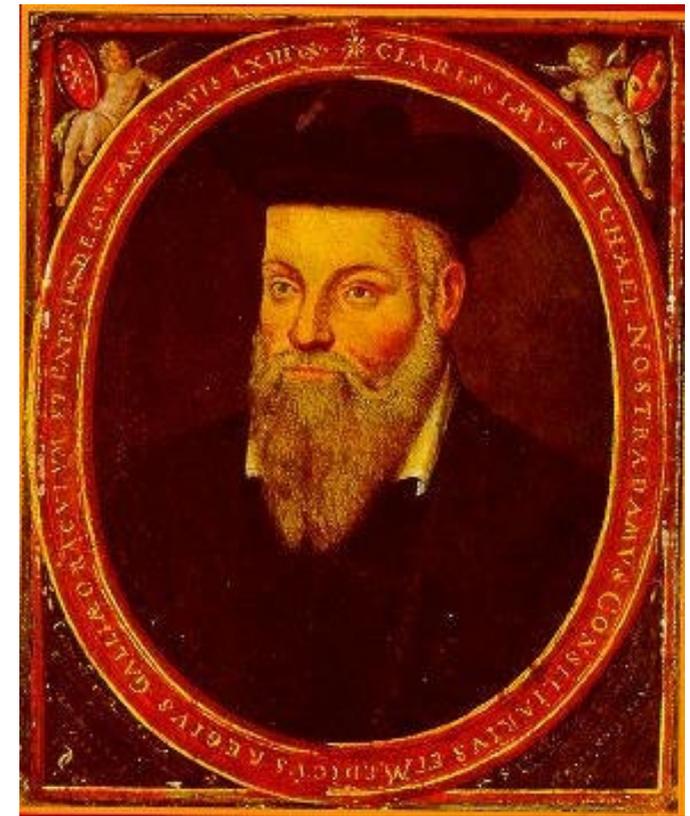
The truth is it is all one big distraction. There is no point thinking about the end of the world and how all the Christians will be with Jesus for ever. There is even less point thinking that there will be some sort of Rapture will save us from suffering from our faith, and we can look forward to that you only have to look at any western country to see

people who are suffering for their beliefs. I'm not solely thinking of Nadia Eweida and her dispute with British Airways over the cross on her neck chain, nor even of any bed and breakfast owner not willing to let unmarried couples of any sexuality share a double room, but also of anyone who is afraid to mention they are a Christian in the workplace, or for that matter, anywhere at all. Ordinary people in ordinary situations.

And then there are those who risk imprisonment, torture and

death for taking the gospel to countries with governments who do not want it.

As a Christian, I believe Jesus is one day going to return and end all suffering. Maybe there will be a Rapture of all believers seven years in advance as some would hold - much as I severely doubt it. None of it matters. And why is that? Because we might not be alive when Jesus returns. Even the most cautious and careful person could get killed in a road accident which is not their fault.



Nostradamus: Renaissance-era France's answer to *L. Ron Hubbard*

Cancer could take us. Underlying medical conditions. You name it. None of us know whether we will still be alive in an hour's time (although the chances are that we will.) All that is necessary for me to know is that as a Christian, I believe we all need Jesus, and I want to live in a way that tells everyone that

life after death is not the point, it's the bonus, the relief, the icing on the cake after a life lived with the very best of the very best, who walks beside us every step of the journey.

I want them to know about the holy God who demands purity, but loves us so much that Jesus died to take



Life as we know it.

The next edition of **@THELAWKIT** will be published on June 13. As usual on <http://lawk.it>

Your comments and contributions are welcome. Submissions for #3 by June 6.