



Issue 1



# 3 Men & 1 Dead-line

For the last two months I tried to come up with an idea of what I'm going to write for the first issue of the Ovi magazine. I kept making drafts but none satisfy me - one thing is for sure: the why. The Ovi e-magazine is born of a real necessity. Not the necessity of another internet magazine, another opinion, or another alternative artistic opinion and contemporary stand, but as a live portfolio for people who want to show their work and their ideas.

One measure of the success for people, who are involved in the media world, writing or designing, is how often your work has been published, when and what reaction it provoked. And this is what judges you for the real world. When you just finished college your only past is inside the very school magazines which don't really count as experience but more as warming up before the reality comes.

To become a journalist or an art-director of a magazine is a long journey and part of it is to create a unique personal style. The only tools you have are your brain and constant reading, anything from sports magazines to comics, everything that helps you to understand and evolves your own style. The days when Ernest Hemingway was writing in a newspaper when he was only sixteen have long passed, nowadays the first question you get in an interview is what degree you have and where else you have published your work. And coming to the degree, we manage all right but coming to the last published article...hmm, I think for me it was in the last century in a different language.

Asa, John and I met a few months ago and somehow the chemistry worked. We are the same and so different at the same time. I have enjoyed long political conversations with John and cultural jokes with Asa.

Both native English speakers even though coming to John, Asa and I have some objections, he is native American speaking and that's how we first met whilst I was making him angry joking about his Americanisms. Asa is working to create his own style but the sure thing is that he has his own accent and when we first met I could understand less than half of the things he was saying and to make it worse I'm not native English speaking, even though I have spent a big part of my life in England. So I have my natural Greek accent that confuses them both or provokes many linguistic jokes from their side.

Asa and I live in Finland which means that we definitely have no former experience in the local media and our personal past doesn't count since it obviously happened on a different planet. John lives in the States which makes it more challenging to create something through the net and correspond from the other side of the ocean. But that is what we trained for, that's what we love and that's what we want to do for the rest of our lives.

So an e-magazine was the natural next step since financially we couldn't afford the publication of any other kind of media. Ovi will become our live portfolio. It will become our free stage to perform what comes naturally to us.

As I mentioned in the beginning, the three of us represent different opinions, different cultural backgrounds and different ages which makes a good cocktail, occasionally an explosive cocktail.

The Ovi magazine reflects our personalities and our ideas. It is political in the sense that we have our political ideas and they are influencing our writing but they will never be the magazine's line. As a magazine we are not going for or against anybody but to quote Balzac: "I'm going to defend your right to say whatever you want." And we want to have your opinion on our articles. We want your opposition to our ideas because that's exactly what built the democracy Socrates dreamed.

Of course, there are certain issues we are against in principal. We are against racism, any kind of racism. We are against any kind of prejudice. Unfortunately prejudice is something that expands from race and religion to sexuality, beliefs and appearance. We are against any kind of fanatics, our society suffers from fanatics. We are against violence, especially the one that starts inside the house.

Last, the name Ovi came from the Finnish language and it means 'door' since the Ovi project represents a number of doors for us. A door to expose ourselves, our work, to communicate and to escape if necessary!

The Ovi magazine is going to be in English since the English language, after poverty, is the only global thing at the moment. We are going to publish articles or letters sent to us but we are not going to correct them, except

obvious grammar mistakes, not in disrespect of the language but respecting the thought and the uniqueness of the writer.

Part of the Ovi magazine is another in-magazine with the name "Le Me-teque" and it means "the emigrate" in French. In this in-magazine we are going to talk about our experiences on moving country, the difficulties we had to face and how we solved problems. In this part, a number of friends are joining with their experiences and opinions with the hope that will be able to communicate things it took a bit for us to learn.

The Ovi begins modestly but we strongly believe that it will grow from day to day. We are planning to start with monthly issues but we hope to update it every time we have something to say.

We merely ask your cooperation so this project will become a live portfolio for all of us and a place to exchange thoughts and ideas.

Thank you

Thanos Kalamidas

Following those weeks after Christmas and New Year, when the decorations are returned to the attic and you are sick to death of mixed nut selections, you suddenly realize that your new trousers from Auntie aren't exactly fitting you comfortably. You resolve to exercise and return to your former slender physique, so you scour the New Year Sales for a cheap exercise bike and set yourself a rigorous exercise plan. Summer arrives, the bike has a thick layer of dust and Auntie's present is still hanging in your wardrobe.

"What has this to do with anything?" I hear you grumble, well I was once asked by a friend how it is possible for me to write so easily and so well because he had a nightmare trying to compose an article of just one thousand words. After careful consideration I tendered a response to his question, "I believe it is because I love what I do. I am motivated by writing and entertaining people. I have no motivation for peddling my fat ass on an exercise bike but give me a topic and I will happily burn a few calories typing at the keyboard." My fingers have an hourglass figure.

Writing has always been an obsession in my life and when I enrolled at university the restraining order was lifted leaving me free to pursue it with a passion. One issue that had haunted me all my life was the belief that I wasn't very good at...err, anything. My athletic confidence was dented the first and only time I attended school football practice wearing a fluorescent yellow shell suit and later my parents jokingly compared my running to Rowan Atkinson's Mr. Bean. My lack of self-confidence spread through all areas of life including my writing. Often I would show a piece of work to a friend or family member and they would offer positive feedback and laugh at the appropriate

places but I still didn't believe that they had truthfully enjoyed my work. The root of my problem laid in the fact that I found it straightforward to write something and believed that anybody could do it.

My eyes were opened to the fact that 'not everybody can do it' while proof-reading submissions for a magazine in Finland. Many of the early articles were terrible, they were hard to read, featured blatant plagiarism, had no beginning or end, and frequently gave me a headache trying to sort them out.

It was while working on the magazine that I met a Greek named Thanos and like all great romances we had a rocky start to our relationship but love conquers all. Okay, I am lying but we have become very good friends and he has helped me to believe in my writing ability and set my self-confidence on the road to recovery. Thanos has an incredible ability to instil the belief that you could rule the world if you put your mind to it, I don't have any megalomaniac traits yet, although I am delving into media avenues never before considered.

The other third of the Ovi team is Mr J. Pederson, Wisconsin's favourite Euro-traveller and the nicest Yank I have met this year. We picked John to join our team because he told us that he was always picked last at school and our hearts went out to him; he's also quite intelligent when it comes to politics and Italian scarves. My aim as a Limey (Englishman) is to teach John the rules of cricket, repeatedly tell him to 'queue' and not 'wait in line' and generally follow the current trend of getting on the case of Americans.

Depending upon the order you have read our editorials you will or won't know that the aim of The Ovi (Finnish

for door) is to get our work and names known throughout this global world. We want a living, breathing portfolio that highlights the unique talents that each of us possess. I realise it isn't fair to Thanos and John to be mentioned in the same paragraph as me but then the world isn't fair – you may notice I no longer have literary self-esteem issues. Sincerely, I hope to borrow, steal and learn from their experiences and opinions in all aspects and continue to better myself in the eternal quest to locate my style and establish myself among the literary greats.

Am I drunk on my own self-importance or is it just my brand of self-deprecating humour, which has served me well for years – a personal necessity when you run like Mr. Bean and have a 'unique' name. I love to take the piss out of myself and to try to find the humour in any situation, this has enabled to make friends easily and my personality has been described as infectious, which is probably a good thing.

My primary interest in people has always been their stories, experiences and the anecdotes that they bore everybody with a thousand times. I believe this comes from growing up in a household where stories eventually became the joke. My Dad is teased whenever he begins to tell a story to my wife that we have all heard before and now this has reflected back on me with my wife joking that if something goes wrong at least I have a story to tell later - a healthy outlook on life if you want my opinion.

Articles I currently write are published in either a small local Finnish paper, a monthly Helsinki magazine and on its website, so my work is out there already being received and commented on. In fact, one day I met a friend for coffee and he brought along a friend of his. We began talking

about jobs and whom I write for and the stranger revealed that he had read a few issues, one of which contained a funny story about hating tea, which just happened to have been written by yours truly.

There is nothing better than feedback, of course positive is always nicer than negative but with either at least you know that somebody had taken the time to read and respond to your work. We want you to become involved with The Ovi and to tell us what we are doing well and areas where we need to pull our socks up. The Net is a free for all medium where you can post your views and opinions, a forum where I can say, "I totally respect your thoughts but you are fucking wrong!"

We are writing and maintaining this site because we want to be known. We want to become either famous or infamous. We want to be able to afford a laptop to go and write outside while the sun is shining. We wanted to have a website with our work and we have done it. What have you done recently?

Asa

(Chicago, 06/04)—It's comforting to know that whoever and wherever you are, you and I have at least one thing in common: we're both wondering just what this Ovi magazine is all about. I'm tempted to answer this question by confessing all my hopes and aspirations for this three-manned odyssey into online journalism (if we can call it that). But years of Batman reruns have taught me not to reveal a plot for world domination before it's hatched.

I arrived in Helsinki January 2nd. Merely hours after stepping off the plane, I found myself poised to take a plunge into a frozen lake. Before realizing exactly what the hell I was about to do, I was floundering in the

frigid water and gasping. I emerged from the icy hole as naked as the day I was born (a mere 21 years earlier in beautiful St. Cloud, Minnesota, where people are sane enough to merely fish through holes in the ice) and scurried back to the sauna with the urgency of a true foreigner.

After the burning sensation wore off, I started to think about how—just a few hours earlier—I was celebrating the first day of the New Year back in Minnesota with friends. It was hard to realize that I was now somewhere outside of Helsinki, Finland recovering from a polar plunge. I certainly didn't anticipate this excruciating introduction to my semester abroad. But I learned quickly how to strip down,

leave my expectations in the dressing room, and jump right in, no matter how cold the water or uncomfortable the situation. This attitude served me well as I braved everything from "humpa" karaoke (a strange Finnish combination of a polka music and pop ballads), to pickled herring on toast. And it's this same adventurous spirit that drew Thanos, Asa and myself towards one another and towards the concept of an online magazine.

The exact form and trajectory of this project has yet to be finalized, but a few months ago we decided to give this momentum a name, The Ovi Magazine (Ovi is Finnish for "door"). The plan was to expose our opinions, concerns, skills, personalities and hu-

mor to the world and open the door for honest and intimate cross-cultural dialogue. Where this initiative will lead is anyone's guess. But hopefully it won't be as painful as a plunge into icy water or as embarrassing as the naked sprint back to the sauna. But who's to say.

If there's one thing Yankee learned abroad, it's that expectations leave little room for inspiration. So let's just leave the Ovi open and see what happens!

Cheers, Efharisto and Kiitos

John

Dear God,

By John Pederson

It's a long time since I wrote to you, I think over thirty years, but the last time I tried you were either very busy to bother with me or the postman didn't find your address. And coming to the postman, I can understand that 'seventh cloud on the left' is not much help for anybody and Harry Potter was not anywhere around that time.

If you were too busy to answer that's all right because my father covered for you fixing my broken bicycle. Still the doubt was always somewhere inside my mind, you couldn't listen just once out of a billion, billion times. I try not to think that this is case and I assure you that it is a very, very small doubt.

For a long time after that I stopped asking for your help and I became to believe something the Ancient Greeks said, "Don't expect everything from the gods but...move your hand as well." Something that does and doesn't make sense because if you start moving your hands every time you need help people will think that you are crazy

and you are pretending to be a windmill.

But that was it and everything was fine until a few weeks ago and my daughter's birth, and I remembered my old bicycle. Strange cohesions but...well, you know better how things like that come.

Back to my newborn baby, many strange thoughts crossed my mind. Into what world is she coming? A world that George W. Bush can invade any country he likes just because he has the military power to do it. Do I want her to grow up in a world where the south suffers from hunger, the east from ruthless dictators, the north from unemployment and the west from addictions? Do I want my daughter to live in a world where homeless people die on the streets and nobody cares?

But I suppose God, if you could do something about it, you would have already done it. So I'm not going to waste your time. By the way, I find it really strange while more than half of the world is praying to you to punish George W. Bush he is there crying that he's working for you! But as we said before, either Mr. Bush has better access to your address

being a president or you always have time for him. Again, I can understand you, because as your son said 2,000 years ago, "Blessed the poor to spirit" and, according to the rumours, Mr. Bush is a total idiot. Moments like that I wish I was an idiot; my chances of becoming president of a superpower would be high.

So God, what am I going to say to my daughter in a few years when her bicycle will break and she will ask for your help? I really hope there is no George Bush by then, even though this Kerry doesn't really inspire me since being the 'leader of the free world' is a tempting title for any personality. I hope bad or good dictators won't exist, hunger and HIV, unemployment and homeless people and, most of all, kids won't die from hunger.

Now, dear God, I think I had better cover for you and use the same excuse my father used with me, "Even God needs some rest." Just hope that it will be Sunday again!

Thank you,  
Thanos

In 'Dear John' we write a letter to our friend based across the Atlantic about American stuff that makes us scratch our head and ask, "WTF, mate?!"

Dear John,

Forgive me any mistakes you may find in this correspondence but my head feels as though the England football team have been practising their free kicks with it and my stomach is on the threshold of sending me to worship at the white porcelain altar. Yes, I am suffering from a hangover of monumental proportions after hitting Helsinki town for one too many Newcastle Brown Ales last night.

My friend's brother was celebrating his 18th birthday and we wanted to mark his passage into manhood by treating him to shots from those strange bottles that hide at the back of the bar. The evening was a success, although we did lose the party boy at one point during the night but later found him performing the Technicolor yawn in the toilets. Conversation throughout the night was varied but we did hit upon the subject of legal drinking age and how strange it is that both America and Russia have a minimum age of 21. Bloody hell John, 21 years old! I had been drinking for four years come that birthday courtesy of a fake college ID.

Nobody could believe that in the U.S. you can enlist in the army at 18, go off to fight in foreign climes but not be able to legally have a

drink upon your return - bizarre. There has been a great deal in the press recently about binge drinking and how girls in the U.K. and Scandinavia are beginning to out-drink boys. Apparently, American girls are hot on the trail, too.

I am English and the English have a reputation as heavy drinkers. This reputation is both false and true in that we go out many nights a week for a couple and then get totally 'fitshaced' at the weekend. The Finns on the other hand don't go out during the week to relax, instead opting to walk the thin line between brain damage and alcohol poisoning.

I have read that even though many countries have minimum drinking ages ranging from 16 in France to 21 in your neighbourhood the behaviour is pretty much the same. Starting to drink at an early age doesn't make you any more responsible; if you ever see some of the middle-aged men in English or Finnish pubs you will understand that age has nothing to do with it.

Back to the discussion last night, I suggested that even though it may be healthier and all for Americans to hold off the booze a few extra years why can't you have the choice to drink? Not every 18-year-old drinks to excess, well some of us do it once and never go there again...not for a few weeks anyway. You have the choice to enlist, to smoke cigarettes, to travel around the world and a host of other life threatening activities, so why can't you choose to grab

a chilled six-pack whenever you want?

A few years ago I was in San Diego with my family and we went for a meal the evening before my 21st birthday. Technically, with the time zone difference, I was 21 in the land of my birth but a mere five hours from U.S. legal age which meant that the waitress still refused me a beer to celebrate. The next day we crossed the border into Mexico where even my 18-year-old brother could order a beer.

Eventually I had to respect the position of our waitress and was quietly impressed (and flattered) by the constant request to prove my age, which only occasionally happens in the UK and Finland. I also admired the fact that only a passport would suffice and in some establishments when I bought a round they wanted ID from everybody having a drink.

John, I don't know whether leaving it to 21 is sensible or not but why do the majority of American TV shows and movies show college students desperate to try a drop of this liquid drug. Is it a case of making it desirable by making it illegal? Or doesn't the U.S. Government believe that you are adult enough to handle your liquor at 18?

Bottoms up!

Asa

## Long live polka music!

By John Pederson

(Chicago 07/05) –It all started with a strange phone call from my friend Adam, “John, John, what are you doing tonight?” he stammered. I had no plans but something in his tone made me reluctant to admit it.

“Uh, um... not sure, why?” I managed. But he wasn’t listening.

“OK, good, we’re going polka dancing in Milwaukee. Pick you up at six.” Click.

What? Did I hear him correctly? Did he say, “polka dancing”? Who goes polka dancing? Certainly not any self-respecting 22-year-olds. Or so I thought.

A few hours later I found myself sitting in Adams old pickup truck on my way to Milwaukee. As we exited the freeway and pulled into an overpriced parking lot, I felt my curiosity morph into pure consternation for having wasted another precious Friday chasing down a “good time” with this kid. But I didn’t have a chance to voice my protest. As soon as Adam turned off the motor, I became hypnotized by a strange “umpa-umpa” beat

resonating from across the lot. Before I knew what was happening, my hips started shaking and feet shuffling to the musical stylings of the Polka Family bands.

I guess enchantment is the closed word for it. It wasn’t the first time I’d heard polka music. My grandpa used to listen to it all the time. I remember driving down to the corner café for lunch, his foot tapping the accelerator in-time with the seesaw rhythm of the accordion. Back then, polka music was just my soundtrack for carsickness.

But that was all before my out-of-body polka experience in Milwaukee. I discovered that—when performed live—polka music taps into a wellspring of potential energy: the geriatric gyrations, silver spins, and orthopedic stomps of the plaid polkster.

The energy I felt that evening was laced with the exhalation and release of a long-awaited homecoming, a group of seniors getting in touch with a sense of movement, soul, and—arguably—rhythm that had been denied to them by the ever-devolving status quo of the pop music and dance. Most of them fell off

the boat sometime around the mash potato, struggled to keep footing during the Electric Slide and simply lost the will to try by the time the Macarana was disgracing dance halls around the world.

But here’s the thing: these folks never lost a step. We lost them. These silver-haired swingers are still out there, shakin’ what we hipsters would otherwise deny them with our techno groves and indie beats.

For proof just visit a polka fest near you. You’ll be glad you did, and so will the 60-year-old sweetheart your dancing with.

## Noise pollution: the not-so-silent threat

By John Pederson

(Chicago 6/05) I had a rude awakening last weekend when a chorus of trucks, jackhammers and subwoofers rattled me from the depths of my first Chicago-size hangover. It happens all the time (being rudely awoken that is—not slovenly hung over.)

After the ringing in my ears died down, I stumbled to the window and noticed that it was actually a beautiful day... the sun was shining, people were out walking, birds were chirping. Well I couldn’t actually hear the birds above the angry car horns and blaring stereos, but they must have been out there somewhere.

Unable to fall back asleep, I headed to a nearby park for some quiet convalescence. But these plans would also be defeated, this time by the deafening drown of lawn mowers and weed trimmers. But I still wasn’t taking it too personally. After all, how could the city’s maintenance crew know I was recovering from a blustery night out in the Windy City? So, I decided to retreat further yet to the beachfront of lake Michigan, just a short bike ride away.

I unfurled a blanket and took a deep breath, just basking in the

sunny silence. That is until a deafening howl jolted me to my feet. With my synthetic nervous system on full alert, I scanned the horizon to find a small commercial plane swooping closer and closer to shore and tailed by a banner advertising a local tanning salon.

I started to wonder whether I was somehow being punished for my behavior the night before. But I decided I was just being too sensitive to the sounds of the city, sounds that I would normally just shrug off with nothing more than a passing cringe.

But this got me thinking, our senses connect us to our surroundings; they are the means by which we internalize the outside world. And I couldn’t help but feel horribly exposed and somewhat exploited as I laid there on the beach. I felt naked (metaphorically speaking of course). Of our five senses, hearing is the one that we have the least control over. We cannot regulate the sounds a city imposes on our ears the same way we can shield ourselves from offensive sights, sounds, smells and tastes. This channel to our internal environment it completely unchecked and vulnerable to whatever trash is thrown its way.

At face value, this sounds like nothing more than a violation of personal space. But it’s more than that.

According to the director of the

Noise Pollution Clearinghouse, Les Blomberg, “Noise triggers a natural, instinctual fight or flight reaction in people that produces a shot of adrenaline...” He went on to explain that this extra adrenaline in our blood gradually wears on the heart and nerves, creating higher rates of heart disease.

But let’s be honest, cities are just noisy places. A lot of people going about their business in a confined area equals a lot of noise.

But does living in the city really mean conceding our right to five minutes of silence? Was this a sacrifice I made when I decided to move to Chicago?

Maybe I just always took silence for granted. I certainly never thought quiet moments were in danger of going extinct. But I guess it’s not as intuitive or as unalienable of a right as I once had thought. “Noise pollution,” as it is commonly referred to, is receiving more and more attention from citizen advocacy groups and governmental bodies these days. I guess I’m not the only one that thinks silence is worth making a little noise to protect.

## Pay for the tour tightwad!

By John Pederson

(Finland, 04/04) I have a love-hate relationship with museums. They entice my curiosity but exploit my stinginess.

It's the same thing every time. I fork over the entrance fee, grab the free info on the exhibits and scoff at the suckers paying for the tour. But I always walk away feeling dissatisfied with the experience. My only solace is that I saved enough money to forget the whole thing over a pint.

But a recent trip to the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg convinced me to change my ways.

I arrived at the museum with guidebook in hand and spent the morning trying to extract every ounce of information and interpretation out of the outdated book. After a few hours of wandering aimlessly through the 3 million piece collection, I gave up and just focused on remembering a few names for future dinner conversations. Renoir, Monet, Cezanne and Da Vinci should be enough to convince someone I've been there, I thought to myself.

On my way out, I observed a tour group across the room. The guide was talking about something called "fauvism" while the

group nodded their heads in the direction of a simple and colorful painting of a ballerina. I wondered why they were spending so much time talking about the homely ballerina that I had passed without a second look.

At this moment, something snapped. I think it was the starving artist within me demanding his meager ration. I stopped in mid-stride, turned on my heels, and marched down to the information desk to purchase a ticket for the 12:30 tour. I felt a rush of excitement and anticipation as I stood in the ticket line, almost tasting the sweet sensation of information, the power of cultural currency. This feeling was already more gratifying than the stingy satisfaction associated with most of my museum trips.

I stood in the lobby savoring this thought until—suddenly—I was surrounded by a group of inquisitive tourists wearing agitated half-smiles. They looked undecided, like they might be excited about the next hour, if their feet didn't hurt so damn much. A few moments later, a tour-guide cowed us up the stairs and into the first gallery. As she spoke, I realized I was seeing the museum for the first time (despite the fact I had been wondering its hallowed halls all morning). The paintings reached out and introduced themselves to me.

I examined the "youthful tension" in Michelangelo's Crouching Boy, pondered the "humanist dreams of Ideal man and a harmonious life" represented in Leonardo's Madonna Litta and learned of Zeus's seduction in Titian's Danae. Now I was nodding my head as I passed the Matisse exhibit and learned of fauvism, an art movement characterized by simple forms and vivid color. It was not an elitist satisfaction, but an intimate enjoyment and novel appreciation of the power and accuracy of artistic expression.

I realized that, like anything else, art is imbued with meaning by the eye of the beholder. The Mona Lisa has no more intrinsic value than any other piece of art. But—unlike lesser known works—the Mona Lisa has been incorporated into a cultural discourse that spans continents and generations. One can observe her androgynous beauty with an unknowing eye, but to know what she's smiling about is definitely worth the seven bucks for the tour!

## Revoke their artistic license

By Thanos Kalamidas

Last week I went to an art gallery opening in Helsinki. I had never been before to an art gallery opening in Helsinki; usually, and accidentally, when I notice an art gallery I just step in and quietly look at the paintings. However, an opening was a new experience for me and made me realize how important art is for the Finnish people!

Actually, it is important for the foreigners who live here since one of the painters at this certain opening was a foreign immigrant and, of course, many of the visitors that came to honour him were foreigners.

I was amazed by the knowledge all of them had about paintings and art in general, "Impressionism with a touch of realism", "I love Dadaism", "The total Pop Art", "Look at the colours, feel the dynamism", "Milan Kundera in colour", well I was shocked! All my knowledge and appreciation about art was something less than zero. There was a carousel of colour around me and I was trying to find the black depressing Dadaism, a touch of realism, even some dots of Pop Art and not to mention Kundera; then from nowhere tanks were invading Prague.

At that point I made my first (and last) mistake of the night, which didn't include the fatal mistake of stepping inside the gallery, I said, "I think Impressionism, Dadaism

and Pop Art are nowhere around these paintings." The way they looked at me! It took a couple of minutes for the message to reach my brain, another two minutes to analyze it and, while everybody was still looking at me, it took me only seconds to run out of the gallery.

The message drumming in my mind was loud and clear: You are not an artist! You are not an artist! But how did they know? Simple, from my clothes! That night I learnt some very precious lessons. The people who go to art galleries are artists. To be an 'artist' means to know the right words and use them. Nothing makes you an artist more than what you wear. I am a disaster!

That night I was wearing my usual jeans, a black t-shirt under a denim shirt and tennis shoes that I find very comfortable; after all, it was a warm autumn night. I should have worn a deep red or light blue pair of trousers, a colourful shirt over a t-shirt that states in huge letters: I'm an artist. I know I should wear camouflage army boots, sit a bright fez upon my head and I shouldn't have an opinion! I should just know the right words, like "beautiful brush lines" but usually I do know the correct words.

Later I discovered some other things that make an artist: Vegetarianism is a must, poor is a must, ecology is a must and you must've read that, even though most of time they have only seen the film. Finally, according to the

'artists', being an artist means that you have an opinion on every form of art! If you are an actor you can paint, write, play music, dance and make the perfect espresso.

Suddenly the only thing came to my mind was Mozart. A Bohemian soul who really lived every moment of his life, then I remembered El Greco's passion for women and life, Raphael's love for nature and Warhol's factory, and I felt so grateful that I'm not an artist!

## Change of Democracy

By Thanos Kalamidas

The re-election of President George W. Bush must bring a strong sense of bitterness to all those who believed in the mystic powers of democracy and the power of the people. Most of all, the result of this year's USA elections was unfair to Mr. Kerry and all those people who united around the world to stop Mr. Bush.

The idea of elections in a democratic country is when the republic has the chance to correct the mistakes, punish the arrogant, stop the manipulation of an oligarchy over the lot and protect their rights. Mr. Bush's triumphal re-election for another four years proves that the meaning of democracy is changing and this is something that we must consider and take seriously.

Putting aside the most powerful war machine in human history this man controls, he ignores the UN and every other institution and that he starts wars with lies; the element that should really alarm us and the biggest danger to any idea about democracy is the successful use of words as 'faith' and 'good or bad values'.

The use of these arguments, without any ideological or philo-

sophical base, takes us to different eras from the past centuries. We try to forget and it lacks any kind of dialogue since it is impossible to find the meaning of truth under the threat of a gun and the use of lies.

Unfortunately, the democrats in USA talk about strategic mistakes and the complicated world we are living in, most of the Europeans and surprisingly Iran, honourable member of Mr. Bush's axis of evil and strong candidate for the next invasion, welcomed the re-election of somebody they know, than the election of somebody they don't know.

All this is politics and sadly not democracy. Hopefully, the Europeans will finish something they already started: keep away from the American dream.

## What is the cost?

By Thanos Kalamidas

Do you know how much it costs to become a graphic designer? The question is not rhetorical - we are talking about a real situation if you want to be a real graphic designer.

Let's see, you first need hardware, which means: an Apple Mac, quick and with the maximum RAM, fully equipped with modem, sound card, etc. You definitely need a PC, even if you don't like to admit it, which is equally fast with a lot of RAM.

Then you need a good scanner, a colour printer and a laser printer. You need a digital camera, storage devices and definitely a good internet connection. Not to mention that nowadays an internet site is a necessity to promote your work. To now, and if you are lucky enough that your best childhood friend has a shop that shells all these things so you have a full discount, you are somewhere around 15,000 euros!

Next, you need furniture but let's say that you take from your room your childhood desk and you pinch from your father's office the chairs you still need a couple of more things but your generous family finds them somehow. As for the office, after begging your father he takes out his car from the garage and you make it your office!

You think you are ready? No! You need software! You need

photographic program, vector program, publishing program, internet publishing program, word processor, antivirus program, 3D program, translators, and animation program. You think that's enough? No! Because dealing with the market it means that for half of these programs you need their competitors as well! Just to be sure that you are compatible with the market.

Let's say now that you are lucky enough to sleep with the dealer of all these programs, so you have again the full discount. How much? 10-12,000 euros. I'm not joking.

And you think you finished? No! You need information, which means books and magazines. Magazines that inform you of the new developments coming out, what's going on in graphic design internationally, in other words, something like 100-200 euros a month.

Now you think you are ready? NO! Because a year later all these programs make an upgrade and because you want to be part of the market, since in an international conspiracy all the market buys the new upgrade, you buy it as well. Let's hope that you still sleep with the dealer and you end up paying something like 5 - 6,000 euros!

So to start as a graphic designer nowadays you must have something like 35,000 euros for the first year, at least, but that is if your best friend has a computer hardware shop, you sleep with the software dealer and you steal eve-

rything else from your parents' house!

A friend of mine, a dentist, opened a new practice with all the latest laser machinery and it cost him something less than 25,000 euros! What else can I say?

Something must change and everything has to start with the software companies, especially if they want to see more illegal copies of their programs going around. Why? Copying programs is a huge argument and if you don't understand where the problem is, please do read this article again!

## NATO: Never Attack This Organization

By Thanos Kalamidas

For the last few months I've been trying to follow in the Finnish media this talk about NATO. Now, coming from a country that's a proud member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization I feel the obligation to inform you about this club: I'm 'voluntarily' a member. NATO is a fearful martial organization, with army, navy fleet, aeroplanes, cannons, every kind of bombs; and this organization was made to guarantee the security of its members from any kind of attack.

All these fortunate and happy countries can sleep peacefully since there are generals, many generals, in many staffs: navy staff, air force staff, army staff, joint staff, you name it, staff. Incidentally these generals always have pompous names, like sir, von, de, van, lord and, every so often, they take their armies into the German forests to scare the squirrels, navy fleets into the Aegean Sea to scare the dolphins and planes to race the seagulls across the Atlantic Ocean using all these 'made in USA' bombs to scare the 'enemies'.

These generals regularly fly around the member countries inspecting and organizing armies, air bases, checking if a member country needs something new or a more sophisticated weapon,

higher technology or training in one of the highly experience and equipped American bases.

They come with maps, war plans and war games telling you, "They will come from here!" or "The invasion will start exactly here!", but don't worry, whatever happens, wherever the invaders come from, NATO has the right answer and the right equipment safely made in USA. As a member you have to buy this equipment and when they perform their inspections and notice that you need to renew some of these old things and improve security by buying a couple of those and these...then you get the bill!

Personally, I never saw that bill, but I remember over the last thirty years reading that our army needs to buy new guns since we must reach the NATO standards and that it will cost us so many millions of dollars. We also need a new fleet, so many millions of dollars, and, don't forget, the so successful F16 planes - we are always close to the standards but never quite there.

In my country there are homeless people; there is a nearly ten percent unemployment and a percent that lives under the poverty line. The cost of just one F16 could feed and house these people for more than a year and leave some change to build a couple of schools too. Ten years ago my country bought a hundred of those F16s for our peace

and security! In meantime the number of homeless has increased.

Don't worry! NATO always has its way to keep you needing protection. First it was Russians, then terrorism, next it will be little blue women from Venus, in the meantime we invade Iraq...oops, NATO never invades. I forgot it was a defensive preventive war for our peace and security!

One more amazing thing about NATO is that it has a Chief who accidentally happens to be the same person that leads the world's biggest power. The word 'accidentally' was meant to be there since the leader of this biggest power is an accident, a bad accident since he thinks that God sent him to fight evil. How his God helps him fight evil by killing thousands of innocents, that's something I don't understand. But this is something I will talk about in October when the very same man, with the help of his God, will ask to be re-elected.

Dear Finns, I would suggest you keep to investing in your health system that sickens lately, help unemployed and homeless people, pray to your God that the accidents will finish next November and hope for peace on earth without hydrocephalus organizations that create enemies when the old ones are finished just because war is their business.

## The practice of graphic design

By Thanos Kalamidas

I've been in this business for nearly twenty years. Twenty years as an Art Director and graphic designer! It's a long time and this job has changed a lot during this time. Once upon a time, we could make miracles with a photograph, a pen and a chisel...now we have computers. I don't know what is better, even though being a dinosaur in this job I think we did more with a chisel than we do nowadays with the cutter in Photoshop. At least then, we had to put our imagination to work; now it's just clip art! I think that nowadays waves of adverts are inspired by the new Photoshop effects and not because of hard thinking and creation. Creation is magic work; sometimes it takes me two days to create a poster or a logo and some other times it takes me two months. Most of this time I spend thinking and drawing thousands of drawings on hundreds of pieces of paper, napkins and whatever else I find in front of me. I have spent hours mixing colours, watercolours, oil colours, crayons and looking at the Pantone guide. I need to feel the colours. I said before I am a dinosaur. Then I move to the computer. Usually I move to the computer for the last part of the work, the actual making. Of course, working with a vector or a photographic pro-

gram you change your basic idea, you improve it and sometimes a second and a third one comes. Sometime ago a restaurant services company asked me to design a logo for them. What was the best and the simplest idea from a circle that represented a plate and a square that represented a napkin. After I made the final drawing, I had a whole concept in my mind. I could imagine the brochures, the adverts, even the radio adverts. I strongly believe that this was one of the best logos I have designed in the last few years and I'm proud of it. Again, I worked the idea for nearly two weeks doing a series of drawings, cutting papers and trying everything with real plates and napkins. Then I walk in the city and I see all the posters, the logos, the slogans around me and, for most of them, I have the idea that either I've seen them before or I know the clip art been used. Art Directing and graphic design took the recognition we all wanted. Suddenly they became fashion and art. They became cool and a solution. Cool because you could be an artist without being able to paint and a solution because you suddenly could have a profession that sounded artistic but you didn't need to do much to prove yourself - the computer does most of the job! Everybody thinks that they have an artist in them. Art schools are difficult; graphic design schools are

easy. You don't have pass exams, you don't have to be able to draw or paint, you just need to have the money to pay the cost of the school. And these art schools teach you how to work the programs and they give you a series of 'rules'. Dear friends, art directing and graphic design is art. To make a poster it needs creativity, knowledge of materials and a sense of perspective. Good knowledge of any picture and vector program is useful, as much as it is useful to know what brush to use when you paint with oil colours, but it never gives you inspiration or creativity. On the contrary, it keeps you inside the walls that limit you. I'm not against the use of computers. I use them myself. I'm against seeing the computer as the solution and not the tool. It took us a long time to make our profession respectful, now is the time to put some rules into the practice of what we like to call the art of graphic design before we lose this respect, and this time it will be hard to earn it back.

## **NATO: Never Attack This Organization**

By Thanos Kalamidas

For the last few months I've been trying to follow in the Finnish media this talk about NATO. Now, coming from a country that's a proud member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization I feel the obligation to inform you about this club: I'm 'voluntarily' a member. NATO is a fearful martial organization, with army, navy fleet, aeroplanes, cannons, every kind of bombs; and this organization was made to guarantee the security of its members from any kind of attack.

All these fortunate and happy countries can sleep peacefully since there are generals, many generals, in many staffs: navy staff, air force staff, army staff, joint staff, you name it, staff. Incidentally these generals always have pompous names, like sir, von, de, van, lord and, every so often, they take their armies into the German forests to scare the squirrels, navy fleets into the Aegean Sea to scare the dolphins and planes to race the seagulls across the Atlantic Ocean using all these 'made in USA' bombs to scare the 'enemies'.

These generals regularly fly around the member countries inspecting and organizing armies, air bases, checking if a member country needs something new or a more sophisticated weapon,

higher technology or training in one of the highly experience and equipped American bases.

They come with maps, war plans and war games telling you, "They will come from here!" or "The invasion will start exactly here!", but don't worry, whatever happens, wherever the invaders come from, NATO has the right answer and the right equipment safely made in USA. As a member you have to buy this equipment and when they perform their inspections and notice that you need to renew some of these old things and improve security by buying a couple of those and these...then you get the bill!

Personally, I never saw that bill, but I remember over the last thirty years reading that our army needs to buy new guns since we must reach the NATO standards and that it will cost us so many millions of dollars. We also need a new fleet, so many millions of dollars, and, don't forget, the so successful F16 planes - we are always close to the standards but never quite there.

In my country there are homeless people; there is a nearly ten percent unemployment and a percent that lives under the poverty line. The cost of just one F16 could feed and house these people for more than a year and leave some change to build a couple of schools too. Ten years ago my country bought a hundred of those F16s for our peace

and security! In meantime the number of homeless has increased.

Don't worry! NATO always has its way to keep you needing protection. First it was Russians, then terrorism, next it will be little blue women from Venus, in the meantime we invade Iraq... oops, NATO never invades. I forgot it was a defensive preventive war for our peace and security!

One more amazing thing about NATO is that it has a Chief who accidentally happens to be the same person that leads the world's biggest power. The word 'accidentally' was meant to be there since the leader of this biggest power is an accident, a bad accident since he thinks that God sent him to fight evil. How his God helps him fight evil by killing thousands of innocents, that's something I don't understand. But this is something I will talk about in October when the very same man, with the help of his God, will ask to be re-elected.

Dear Finns, I would suggest you keep to investing in your health system that sickens lately, help unemployed and homeless people, pray to your God that the accidents will finish next November and hope for peace on earth without hydrocephalus organizations that create enemies when the old ones are finished just because war is their business.

## **Stabbing free press Lehdistön puukotus**

By Thanos Kalamidas

At the beginning of last week, a Greek sports' reporter was stabbed in a very well planned attack with just one aim: to kill him.

Philipos Syrigos was the target because he did what every reporter should do, find the truth and expose it. Philipos did that for long time in an environment that is like moving sand, sports.

Sports nowadays are full of money, drugs, scandals, money laundering and violence, using and manipulating masses of people for any cause. In some countries, the fans of a football team are the very same followers of a political party; that's why Philipos Syrigos felt obliged to make the difference and why reporters should make the difference.

The two men who tried to kill him

that evening were just the tools of those responsible who resorted to cowardly mafia methods. Philipos Syrigos has been investigating three cases for the last year:

1. He had found that there is something wrong regarding the financiers of the Olympic Games in Athens. The President of the Athens' Olympic Games and her billionaire husband were somehow involved in companies that had done a lot of work for the Olympic Games gaining unbelievable profits; companies that disappeared after the closing ceremony.

2. He was the first one to talk about a doping scandal when the case of Kenteris and Thanou came out. He even said that he was aware of the 'accident' the two athletes had, two hours before it happened.

3. He uncovered a scandal about a well known businessman and owner of one of the biggest football teams in Greece who has a dark past that involves the former

East German secret service Stasi and his 'investments' in Greek sports.

Given time, those who committed Philipos Syrigos stabbing will be arrested, while those responsible for stabbing the free press never will. Following the incident, the editor of the Guardian said: You don't need to be Agatha Christie to guess who's behind everything. Philipos is well, out of the hospital and ready to finish his obligations.

## Olympic Games

By Thanos Kalamidas

The word 'paranoia' is Greek, the word 'sygnomi' is also Greek and it means 'I'm sorry.' CNN used both words as a headline the day after the closing ceremony of the 28th Olympic Games in Athens to describe how I have felt over the last three years. The headline was: "Sygnomi Greece. You overcame the world's paranoia to stage glorious Games" I'm sure the copywriter who thought up this title didn't have me in their mind, but the title was definitely talking to me and I would accept the apology if the paranoia didn't continue. These last three years the Olympic Games issue became personal since everybody, and here I include close friends, held me personally responsible for anything the media were reporting. And the international media have me no mercy. In the beginning the big question was: Why did Greece take the Olympic Games? Greece is too small for something like that; Greece will never manage to do what Sydney did in 2000. In vain I tried hard to explain that that's exactly the spirit of the modern Olympic Games, that there isn't a big or small, we are all equal and we all have the right to organize the Olympic Games. The second reason was that if there was not Greece there would be no Olympic Games. The Olympics are Greek

and this is not chauvinistic, it is pure historical truth. Last, and if I remember well, nobody was expecting Sydney to do what Atlanta did eight years before. Things got worse a year before the opening ceremony. The New York Times started writing that Athens was not going to be ready, so Sydney was getting ready to take over, The British Guardian was writing about a disaster and Washington Post called it the Greek farce. Then the paranoia of a terrorists attack came out. Of course terrorists were going Athens. The only thing I didn't read was that bin Laden had a marketing office in the middle of Athens. Paranoia became hysteria (another Greek word). The foreign minister of Australia announced that he wasn't sure if the Australian team would come to Greece because they were sure of a terrorist hit. The famous tennis player Venus Williams, in an interview for CNN, said that she wouldn't come to Athens because she was scared. And it didn't stop there. A month later Afghanistan became safer than Athens since no travel instructions were coming out from the USA foreign office. Obviously the American Olympic team was feeling safer in Kabul than in Athens. Greece had to spend 32 million euros to satisfy the Americans, the Brits, the Australian and the Finnish demands on security. Do you realize what 32 million euros means to a country with 9% unemployment and nearly

5,000 homeless people? Greece is a mountain country one-fifth the size of Finland with double the population; a poor agricultural and fishing country where tourism is the biggest incomes. This is where the Olympic Games hurt Greece more and this is the point where the international media, including Finland, are responsible. Spain, Turkey and Egypt had a record number of visitors while Athens was hosting the Olympic Games. People decided to change their destination and, instead of watching the Olympic Games in its birthplace, they watched it in a Turkish bar. This is the very same Turkey where terrorists hit the British counsel two years ago, killing a high standing officer of the British foreign office. The media were responsible for people not coming but they couldn't admit it, again the Helsingin Sanomat honoured the Athens' Olympics with an article about the empty stadiums. Has anybody realized that to fill these stadiums everyday 11 million tickets should have been sold? 11 million people had to do nothing else for 17 days except go from morning to night to all these stadiums to watch all kinds of sports. Where were the Americans, the Brits and the Finns? Too scared for a terrorist attack to come! Like that was not enough, Finland's Helsingin Sanomat had a four-page special on the "Greek tragedy". Four pages full of pho-

tos with stadiums and buildings in ruins, with the reporter explaining that what you see is not the ruins of the 2,500-year-old Acropolis but the stadiums that should be ready in a few months. On television YLE and Nelonen followed with extended reports about the coming Greek disaster, but in vain I tried to explain again that everything would be ready on time.

That was the period when everybody I knew had a smile on their face while asking me what is happening with the Olympic Games. The scariest thing was that all the stereotypes of Greeks came to the surface. You could read behind the smile what was going on in their mind: Greasy olive skinned south Europeans, they never keep their promises, they are lazy and they are not like us; they are just words, words, words!

Twenty years abroad I have, one way or another, always had to face these stereotypes and for twenty years I have proved to everybody that nothing is further from the truth, not to mention that I don't have olive skin and I have blue eyes.

Occasionally their comments were hurting more and they were becoming insults and the answer, "We were creating civilizations while you were eating each other" wasn't always working since the stereotype answer was their counterattack, "That was then. Ancient history!"

It started making me angry when

most of them were saying that if countries like Finland, who are the best organizers and workers in the world, didn't take the job why did Greece bother. Of course, we are the ones who made the Olympic Games, of course we had the history but we should let the modern European countries, with the knowledge to do it, host them.

Then the Olympic Games started. Everything was ready, the stadiums, the arenas, the pools, and the canoe and kayak lakes. Even extra golf courses because golf may become an Olympic sport in the future and they had to test the game in an Olympic environment.

Mr. Oswald, a high ranking member of the Olympic committee and responsible for the Olympic security, said, six months before the Olympics began, that these were going to be the worst ever Olympic Games and that it was a mistake to let Greece organize them. Two days after the opening ceremony, the very same person publicly stated that the world could learn from the Greeks what security means and that the Olympic village, where the athletes live, was just perfect. He had no other words to describe it. At the closing ceremony, the very careful Mr. Roge, the President of the International Olympic Committee, declared that these were the dream Olympics; everything was just perfect.

So, dear Finns, you see, every-

thing was perfect. But not perfect enough because then came the news of the two Greek athletes supposed to be caught in a doping scandal. Again all my Finnish friends were smiling again! I mean it was getting amazing. I had to answer for others for a crime that the Finns were guilty of at a few Summer and Winter Olympics.

It was not only the Finns of course; media from around the world were repeating the same trash, from Poland to Syria, from Argentina and Mexico to Bangladesh and Japan. I'm writing about the Finns because I live here and that hurt me more. I somehow understand the Americans, the Brits, the Germans and the French because they think that they are the only ones capable of doing anything and it is their companies that have transformed the Olympics into the commercial event it is today, they also do most of the work, but when it comes to Finland I get angry.

Finland is going to host the 10th IAAF World Championships in Athletics in 2005 and they will only last one week held in just one stadium. Today nothing is ready; Finland is still looking for ways to raise money to restore the old Olympic stadium. What is Finland going to do when the security questions start? Terrorists were supposed to attack Athens, so why not Helsinki? In the end terrorists hit the metropolis of security, New York. How will the

Finns feel when they see articles like that coming out in the European media? How will they feel when I ask them what they do about security when a 19-year-old boy explodes a homemade bomb and kills seven people in a mall or a psycho kills a man with an axe on the metro without any reason? What they are going to say when photos of drunks passed out on the street circulate around the world?

But going back to the Olympic Games, I would like to give some answers about the doping scandal. What happened to 'everybody is innocent till proven guilty'? Kenteris and Thanou are guilty for not appearing on time for a doping control test, not for taking drugs. This is something the Olympic committee will decide. If the two athletes were taking drugs that's against the Greek laws for drugs and it could mean the two athletes serve a prison sentence - don't worry, if they are guilty they will serve their time, but only if they are guilty.

Personally I believe that they are guilty, but most of the athletes are equally guilty. Look at the records they make. These people are definitely coming from the same planet as Superman; Krypton I think is the name. Nearly eight seconds for the 100 meters! Nearly six meters high! Has anybody realized what it means 100 meters in eight seconds?

Many people didn't understand why people were calling Kenteris's name before the 200m Men's Final, it was Greek humour. They wanted to remind the other runners that if Kenteris is on drugs they are not much different.

Who is to blame for the drugs problem? Perhaps it is the governments. The spirit of the Olympic Games is that everybody is equal on the track with equal possibilities for medals and, most important, is that the participation in the Olympic Games is an award in itself. But governments want gold medals. It is important for the USA to have more medals than Russia, and for Finland to win more medals than Estonia. The winners receive presents from the government, from the sponsors, interviews on television and in the end their own television programme. This is money. A lot of money and, of course, these people will do anything to get them.

Finally, the actual Olympic Games are business fed by gigantic bureaucracy and corruption scandals. What Greece tried to do was to remind us that the Olympic Games carry a message of peace, compete on the track no matter your colour, your religion or size. For the first time the Olympic flame reached all the continents. Reached simple people with the message of global peace, something the sponsors

didn't show us much since the runners didn't have Coca Cola t-shirts like Atlanta eight years earlier, also for \$1000 you could carry the flame for 500metres - the Americans know what the Olympic spirit is. For the first time after two and half thousand years, athletes had the chance to compete in the original stadium and for the first ever time women competed inside the ancient stadium.

Greece proved that they can compete in both ancient history and in every field modern developed countries can enjoy. It made me proud as a Greek to see that we managed to do something people will remember for a long time.

When the Olympic Games finished I thought that my problems were over until somebody said to me, "Why are you so proud? A German designed the Olympic Stadium?" He was actually Italian and his name is Kalatrava, but that doesn't matter. What matters is that the only name I can give to all these comments I have endured for the last three years is jealousy or envy, because if you are so able to do all these things better then why didn't you? Why don't you even dare to apply? Or am I just being paranoid?

## Life's a drag

By Thanos Kalamidas

So there I was for a very romantic dinner and first date with a beautiful girl in a French restaurant with excellent red wine and candles in the middle. My date was perfect, shining in her evening dress and the food was unique, except one minor problem: our table was next to the toilet doors. Two tables either side of a toilet door that opened every so often giving us the artificial smell of pine perfume. I looked at the other table where a young man, with his date, was just looking at me and while we both lit our cigarettes we nodded to each other with an understanding.

Even though I enjoyed the wine and the food, I was much happier when we stepped outside the restaurant and I lit a cigarette without having everybody including the waiter looking at me as though I was a criminal.

That happened something about ten years ago and since then things have changed even more for the smokers. Nowadays you must make sure that the restaurant you are planning to visit has a smokers' section, going to some pubs you think that they deliberately don't clean the smokers' side; the first thing they ask you when you apply for a job is if you smoke.

Over the last ten years I heard all kinds of lectures about smoking. I heard how much it costs my health

and to my wallet. I've seen nightmarish pictures of my lungs and I heard my heartbeat slower than it should. I occasionally suffer from headaches and sometimes I feel sick in the morning after my first cigarette. So, why do I smoke?

For health reasons! For my mental health. I love pizza. I love pizza margarita with double cheese and tomatoes. But what I love most is the taste of the cigarette after the pizza - it's peachy, as a friend of mine says quite often. I love bourbon, but what I love most is the taste of a cigarette while I drink my bourbon and I would never have written this article if I didn't have a couple of breaks for a cigarette. When the doctor said that my heart beats slower I needed a cigarette and I felt so damn good. I have the cigarette, others have butter. Butter kills but I've never seen a big sign on the box saying 'fat kills you' or a poster with somebody's thrombosis. Do you know how many people die every year from coronary thrombosis? More than the ones who die from cigarettes. Here I don't want to say melodramatic things like 'instead of spending money to stop me doing something that I chose to do and enjoy, you've better spend the money on the kids that die from hunger in the Third World counties' or 'do you know how many people have bread on their table because I smoke?'

I smoke for health reasons. When my daughter was born I went out to smoke a cigarette. That unique

moment, my first hours as a father, I wanted to be alone and smoke a cigarette.

I lived parts of my life in Athens, London and Tokyo, the most polluted cities in the world. There the pollution actually kills people and they were wondering why I smoke.

What hurts more is that the 'worry' people show for my health has gradually turned to prejudice and I'm afraid that people like me will, in the end, be victims of a very unique racism. Do you remember the film *Escape From L.A.* with Kurt Russell? The smokers were living in exile.

Again I have to remind you that I smoke for health reasons. On the contrary to what everybody says, I love life and I'm trying to enjoy every minute of my life like it is the last with a cigarette. What did you say? Passive smoking? I totally agree with you and you have as many rights as I have. You have the right to enjoy your dinner with your fat pork steak, layers of butter, mayonnaise full of cholesterol and greasy fries without my smoke bothering you, but remember that I have the same right to enjoy a cigarette after a good meal. In the end we are both going to die; you enjoying the fat you are eating and me the tobacco I smoke. We both made our choice and my choice is to smoke...for health reasons, always!

## **You can beat the lions, so what?**

**By Thanos Kalamidas**

Once upon a time, a gigantic elephant woke up one morning confident he could beat all the animals in a fight. He stood in the middle of the forest and started calling all the animals for a fight.

From morning until noon, the elephant had beaten the leopard, the rhino, the buffalo and the hippo. Early in the afternoon, he had nearly killed the giraffe, the zebra, the eagle and the vulture, while late in the evening he had finished with the tiger and the lion.

After that, he called himself the unbeatable king of all the animals and he decided to build a huge palace fit for a king. Of course, all the animals started working for the 'unbeatable king of all the animals' scared that he would beat them again, so they helped build a five-floor palace with a majestic bed for the elephant on the huge ground floor.

Now the elephant was happy, laying on his bed, eating buck-

ets of peanuts and, every so often, raising his trunk to emit a deafening scream to remind all the animals that he was the 'unbeatable king of all the animals'.

He soon became arrogant and evil, giving orders to everybody, bullying and expecting everybody to serve his strangest wishes like a slave.

After a few days, a little voice whispered into his big ears, "Tomorrow morning I challenge you to a fight in the basement of your house." The elephant frantically looked around trying to discover the identity of the one who had challenged him, but he saw nobody.

Early the next morning he waited for his mysterious opponent in the basement but he could find only boxes, barrels and old furniture. The elephant waited and waited but nobody came, so he became angry and started breaking everything in the basement.

After he had finished breaking all the boxes, the barrels and the furniture, the exhausted elephant returned to his majestic bed, crashed down upon the

mattress and closed his eyes. The quiet voice spoke to him again, 'Tomorrow afternoon I challenge you to a fight in the basement of your house.'

The elephant jumped out of bed and turned the room upside down looking for the voice. His head turned left, right, up and down, but he couldn't see anybody in the room with him. He shook his head and decided to return to bed. The elephant had a very bad night; he didn't get any sleep and was a very nervous creature in the morning.

All morning the elephant paced back and forth looking at the large clock on the wall impatiently waiting for the afternoon to arrive. Finally, the clock struck midday and the elephant ran downstairs into the basement to confront the challenger but the only thing he found was broken boxes, barrels and furniture...nothing else.

He waited and waited and waited, but nobody came. This time he became hysterical and started breaking the broken boxes, barrels and furniture into even smaller pieces, and then he even started crashing his head against the walls nearly knock-

ing them down. Tired and aching he returned to his majestic bed, pulled the soft luxurious covers over his bruised body and closed his eyes.

A minute passed, before the whisper came, 'Tonight I challenge you to a fight in the basement of your house.' The elephant began to shake with anger and fear, he screamed, "Who are you? Why do you do this to me? Don't you know I am the unbeatable king of all the animals? Show yourself!" The reply was silence; the elephant could only hear the sound of his thumping heart and deep breathing.

The elephant watched the sun slowly set on the horizon, plunging his kingdom into night, before he began his usual walk to the stairs leading down to the basement. This time the elephant was too tired, so he decided not to bother and just wait on the ground floor for his tormentor. Once again, time passed and nobody appeared

The elephant's frustration, fear and anger were driving the unbeatable king of all the

animals insane and he began to lose control of his senses. In blind fury, he started smashing his head and his huge body into everything around him, including knocking down the palace walls.

As each wall fell to the floor in pieces the palace began to make some terrible groaning sounds, but the elephant couldn't hear anything over his own screams of anger. The elephant crashed through one wall too many and the weight of the huge palace couldn't be supported any longer.

Suddenly the roof started caving in, which fell on to the fifth floor, then they fell on to the fourth, the fourth on to the third, the third on to the second, the second on to the first and, finally, the five floors and roof fell upon the elephant's back trapping the unbeatable king of all the animals under his huge palace!

Hours later, the animals came to investigate the ruins of the palace after hearing the shouts for help from the elephant and his servants - bully kings like

the elephant always have willing servants who are willing to change loyalties for the next bully winner.

The elephant lay with his back broken, unable to move and aching, summoning the last of his strength the elephant cried, "Who are you?" There was a moment's silence before the elephant answered himself, "I'm you. I am your arrogance and your selfish stupidity."

The animals saved the life of the elephant but took him to a prison because the animals of the jungle respect a leader but they hate any dictator.

This story is dedicated to the President of the United States of America, George W. Bush, with my permission to read it the next time he has to read a story to school kids, like he did one September a few years before.

## Cutting the corner

By Asa Butcher

It is hard to believe that four years have passed since the Summer Olympics were hosted by Sydney. In that time the athletes will have pushed themselves harder in training, shaved vital milliseconds off their personal best, found themselves lucrative sponsors and some will have experimented with the latest undetectable performance enhancing drugs. Of course, I can't wait for them to be sensationally detected and a maelstrom of publicity to destroy their reputation.

Cheating has been a part of the Olympics ever since 388 BC when the boxer Eupolus of Thessaly bribed three opponents to take a dive and in AD 67 Emperor Nero bribed the judges to declare him chariot champion, overlooking the fact that he fell out and never finished the race. During the last few Olympics cheating has become increasingly common but it is not the epidemic that some would have us believe. At Sydney approximately 11,000 athletes participated and 50 were caught, while a recent doping scandal involving Team USA, an Australian cyclist and a Jamaican athlete have shown the start of the process once again.

The necessity for promoting Pierre de Coubertin's Olympic ideal of fair play and honesty has never been greater: "Olympism is a philosophy of life which glorifies the qualities of the body, the will and the mind by unifying them into a perfectly balanced entity. Uniting sport, culture and education, Olympism wishes to create a way of life based on contentment born of effort, on the educational value of setting the example and on the respect of universal ethical principles."

To any individual who has respect for himself, his team or his country, the very idea would be an anathema, but despite the old adage, "Cheat and you only cheat yourself," it seems that the potential lucrative sponsorship deals outweigh the moral implications. Don't tell me, 'It is the taking part that counts.' Money, fame, power: winning is everything in a society plagued with corruption. Society has turned sports into a business. Pressure for success is high, temptation is inevitable and some athletes do turn to the dark side.

Ben Johnson's notorious Olympic 100m final win was the moment that the world sat up and took note of the arrival of ster-

oids. Johnson tested positive for furosemide, a diuretic that can mask steroid presence, but he is not alone on the list: World and Olympic 5000m silver medallist Ali Saidi-Sief, high jumper Juana Arrendel, Canadian sprinter Venolyn Clarke, 11 Paralympians and three Bulgarian weightlifters were all guilty of the same crime.

Anabolic steroids were primarily associated with weightlifters and Eastern Bloc athletes for many years because of their ability to produce the male sex hormone testosterone that stimulates the build-up of muscular tissue. Irish swimmer Michelle Smith was suspected of using steroids and after years of dodging tests she reluctantly produced a urine sample, which was later found to be tainted by enough alcohol to kill her; the presumption was that Smith had added alcohol to the specimen to mask other drugs or make a rather unusual cocktail.

Annually, prohibited substances increase in number, whether they are stimulants, narcotics, anabolic agents, diuretics or hormone treatments, there are back doors and ways to avoid detection. Doctors often help athletes bend the rules and testers acknowledge that

some sportsmen will risk being caught, so they send a message about what are the safest legal substances to take. One expert on performance enhancers stated that athletes who quit taking erythropoietin (Human Growth Hormone) a week before an event would remain undiscovered.

At the Atlanta Games it was thought that many athletes were using the hormone and escaping being detected as there was, and still is, no effective test for it. Benefits of the hormone include increased protein production, rapid muscle growth, fat burning and regulated red-cell production that can improve a marathon by 4 minutes. An overdose with synthetic EPO, on the other hand, makes the blood too thick for the heart to pump, leading to cardiac arrest. Olympic-calibre cyclists are believed to be regular customers for the substance, though it is has resulted in over 25 deaths among their profession in the past 23 years. Sad.

Judgement on those who test positive should be withheld until all the facts are heard. Dennis Mitchell, the US 100m champion and 1992 Olympic bronze medallist, showed high levels of

testosterone but claimed it was a result of having sex at least four times the night before and drinking five bottles of beer, which should be part of any athletes training regime. Ignorance has also proved costly; Andrea Raducan had to return her gymnastic gold medal after discovering that the cold medicine given to her by the team doctor contained a banned steroid, pseudoephedrin, which ironically could have impeded her performance.

Despite all the talk about drug taking, it is not the only form of cheating to occur at the Olympic Games. Some of the best scandals have a comical yet creative twist to them suitable for any movie screenplay: Soviet army major Borys Onishchenko was caught using a fencing sword that tricked the electronic scoring system into awarding him extra points and officials at Sydney's Paralympics discovered that only two of the gold-winning Spanish basketball team actually had a disability.

Sadly only a minority of coaches and athletes are corrupt, the majority choose to win their sport fairly. To ensure that athletes are under constant scrutiny the responsibility falls to

official sports bodies to continue hounding and finding new tests to uncover undetectable drugs. Until then, I believe they have to test every medal winner and uncover at least one cheat because the public would feel the cheats have won if over the course of an Olympic Games nobody was found guilty.

One grim satisfaction comes from knowing that the drug cheats will eventually face further indignity in the form of a lengthy list of side effects: hardened arteries; muscle shrinkage and wasting; brittle bones; circulation problems; shrinking testicles; reduced libido; impotence and infertility; immune system problems; heart failure; strokes; liver, kidney and prostate gland cancers; death. And let's not forget they have to live with a tainted Olympic medal should they ever escape detection.

## Full English or just scrambled?

By Asa Butcher

Land of hope and glory. Rule Britannia. God Save the Queen. Am I missing something? Should my emotions be tingling with patriotism to these hi-jacked jingoistic tabloid dictums? My generation are continually informed that there is little hope of employment after education, the glory of our transport and health systems are deemed fourth world, residents of Britannia are embarrassed to say their nationality out loud and the Queen attracts little attention, unless her image is on a bank note. Disillusioned, confused and uncomfortable with the identity that my country has to offer me, why has it come to this?

Identity, whether international, national or local, has become increasingly blurred with the advent of technologies that make global contact an elementary task. The aim of the European Union to integrate this continent into one super state is slowly rolling towards one inevitable conclusion now that 12 countries have adopted the same currency, the Euro, and are advancing into a new era of co-operation. The identities of the people of

France, Germany, Italy and Ireland are as different as those of England, Scotland and Wales, yet these European states are so clearly bound by geography and, as a consequence, history that economic and political integration has become a reality.

Confusion arises when faced by the paradox of devolution within the United Kingdom. All around us is unity, while we are fragmenting despite the existence of shared cultural and historical bonds, whereas in Europe integration is happening because of them. Consideration of a personal identity never became an issue until the devolution process began and the British Isles were carved up. The Scots, Welsh and Irish have always enjoyed a tenacious and independent identity, although this did not exclude them from feeling British while the UK was enjoying her Pax Britannica. However, without the binding force of the Empire, the World Wars and the nuclear threat of the Cold War, the Celtic constituents have reverted to their own identities.

Once our neighbours had disconnected themselves from the London power source, England was left on its own and culturally naked. From the inception of the British Empire England became subsumed and neglected

to develop its own ethnic diversity, creating an English – British symbiosis, that has left many of us wanting and struggling to find a foundation. During the absence of an obvious identity the creation of a ‘negative’ one has begun to emerge, whose purpose merely acts to counter the more distinct and assertive ethnic identities that are prevalent in major cities.

Racist and xenophobic white males, who have warped national identity into nationalism, have hijacked English patriotism. Nostalgia for the quintessential image of England has vanished beneath the idea that it has been replaced by a nation of drunken yobs. Beer-swilling hooligans, racism and unprovoked violence are closely associated with the British National Party and football supporters who see themselves as patriots and expressing a misplaced identity, such as the social unrest in Bradford and Oldham.

England is in desperate search for a positive alternative that would exist to mirror those traits and help us underpin our perception for the future. Unfortunately, those idiosyncrasies that have been traditionally linked with England in the past, such as honour, sportsmanship, reserve, duty and service are now universally derided. America has

provided arrogant replacements with emphasis on the individual at the expense of the whole, drive to win at any cost, competitiveness and where the game exists only to be won, although they are completely comfortable when exhibiting displays of patriotism that can cause an onlooker to cringe with embarrassment.

Ideals from across the pond began infiltrating our belief systems after the end of World War II, as the U.S. began bestowing their culture through globalisation and cultural imperialism. Britain and wars are synonymous, throughout history the prospect of a good conflict has enabled us to flex the muscles of our Empire and teach Johnny Foreigner a lesson. Britain is a nation who sent its navy half way round the world to fight for a rock full of penguins and Margaret Thatcher won an election off the back of it. Whether it is the Argentineans, the French or the Germans, England is a nation who can still make foreigners feel small with their endless ‘we won the war’ rhetoric that means nothing to those of us who have never been harmed by those respective nations.

Patriotism has sadly become a crude jingoism of the tabloid press, which is over-emotional and arrogant like the American press and was a major component of the British Empire, which

viewed the globe with an air of superiority. Despite being thoroughly snobbish, rude, self-deluding and raping countries of their national wealth and resources, Britain has now returned power to India, Australia, Hong Kong and others, but some Brits still retain the old notions of what we used to be. Bill Bryson describes the situation perfectly in his book ‘Notes From A Small Island’: “Here is a country that fought a noble war, dismantled a mighty empire in a generally benign and enlightened way, created a far-seeing welfare state - in short, did everything right - and then spent the rest of the century looking at itself as a chronic failure.”

Throughout my lifetime there has never been a national celebration for our patron saint and yet the English are all too eager to rush to their nearest Irish pub for St Patrick, buy a daffodil for St David, a thistle for St Andrew or participate in a Yankee July 4th parade. Members of the public who do buy a red rose for St George are seen as either BNP supporters or extreme nationalists, though most regard St Georges’s Day as important as Trinity Sunday, it is greeted with apathy and casually dismissed out of hand, no programmes commemorating the dragon slayer or special Governmental plans to mark the occasion, then again

would many tune in or attend? During the past two decades there have been very few events that have brought the English together in euphoria and allowed them to bask in collective glory. One would be the royal wedding of Charles and Diana that sent the nation into a frenzy, though the fairytale ended in an ugly divorce with revelations concerning the events following July 29th 1981 and the nations princess. The 1996 European Championships were a catalyst for non-violent nationalism when the English football team exceeded expectations and began renewing interest in the sport. Scenes of Wembley Stadium filled with men, women and children singing ‘football’s coming home’, waving St George’s flags, faces painted red and white, the nation had bonded in elation, then it was snatched away and disappointment reigned once again.

Almost is a word that hounds England like flies round faeces. The English take the loser to their hearts because we have grown accustomed to almost qualifying and almost getting to the final, so-close yet so bloody far. An influence of superiority over others does infiltrate us all occasionally and there is no reason why we should be victorious over the ‘Krauts’ and win the World Cup. Take a hard look

at English sport to see that we are not bereft of success on the international scene and there are many opportunities to see athletes competing on behalf of your country.

Olympian Steve Redgrave is one of the greatest living sportsmen and has shown that football is not the only sport in England. In the last decade alone, there have been countless accolades won by the likes of Nigel Mansell, Ellen MacArthur, Ian Botham, Daley Thompson, Steve Davis, Carl Fogarty, Jonathan Edwards and Nick Faldo, between them they keep silver polish companies in profit. Football and tennis may have their spiritual homes here, but those who remember watching the 1966 World Cup final or Fred Perry hold aloft the Wimbledon Men's trophy are now in the minority, while the majority of us have endured countless frustrations that erode both your hope and respect for your country. Expect failure that way you will not be disappointed.

Time has come for a climate where people can rise above the self-degradation that England excels in and be able to shout about its rich cultural environment, architecture spanning thousands of years, some of the greatest athletes, literary figures, explorers and inventors in

history, a varied and stunning natural landscape, ancient and modern traditions that are still significant, produce the greatest thespians and advertisements in the world. It comes as a shock to discover that when you begin to look there is an English identity, one that is seen outside of England but seldom perceived by us. Ask any German or Italian and they see the English as distinctly as they do the Welsh and Scottish.

Perhaps the need to carve out a dominant identity for ourselves has come from the threat of Europe swallowing us up and extinguishing the last of the ideals. Political parties fighting against being run by Brussels, such as the UK Independence Party, believe that it is not only our currency under threat, but our entire legal system, our British nationality, our right to free speech, our police, our armed forces, our own agricultural policy, our right to trade freely and the parliamentary system that underpins British liberty - restoration of our independence, national self-respect and prosperity are unlikely to give a 20-something sleepless nights.

England does, however, owe its existence to huge sacrifices made by its citizens in both war and peace, which have safeguarded this advanced democratic state

against foreign invaders and threats. Today we can enjoy a country that tries to provide public services, looks after our interests on the world stage, a country that will educate, care for, protect and even feed and clothe people regardless of race, religion or gender. We live in a bastion of freethinking liberal ideals that have traditionally offered refuge to those who share those ideals but whose own country does not. Is this part of identity or just a political philosophy?

Being English is all about contradictions, then again maybe not, but one problem that undermines our progression is the stereotypical Oxbridge, we rule the waves, weather obsessed, bowler-hatted gentlemen, watching a game of cricket, with a cup of tea that is so commonly associated with this green isle. A feature that struck a chord and highlighted a few successful elements within the our shores was a MTV short advertising feature entitled 'What's so cool about the UK?' the answers were not far off the mark: our history, sportsmanship, sense of fun, our attitude, the glorious countryside, the food, the weather, the eccentricity, our anarchic streak, the diversity or is it just our music?

We are one of the most tolerant

nations on Earth; millions of immigrants have been absorbed without serious social unrest; by 1998 over one third of inner London children did not have English as their first language; many of our cities have been colonised by foreign cultures, their fashions, cuisines and religions have, primarily, integrated with few problems; huge sums of money are spent on equal opportunities for minorities and this has been part of both the solution and problem of the United Kingdom as a political and psychological entity.

Analysing all the available research and comments leads us to ask the paramount question, not 'do we have an English identity?' but 'do we want one?' The English are such a cultural melting pot of varying ethnic backgrounds that describing what constructs our collective English identity is like looking at a map of England and saying "what do you see?" and replying "Sussex, Cornwall, Somerset, Yorkshire and so on." There is no clear answer to either question; the English identity of somebody born and raised on the south coast to that of a Yorkshire

man is as different today as it was during the Empire. Post-colonial England has paid for its past crimes, my generation enjoy a multicultural world where boundaries are blurred through new technologies, it is time to set our sights on an England that is confident and the whole country can celebrate St George's Day; April 23rd by the way.

## Undermining the Treaty

By Asa Butcher

Once again Finland's President Tarja Halonen has voiced her concerns about the fact that Finland's reputation is suffering on the world stage when it comes to the Ottawa Treaty and banning anti-personnel landmines. Her worries carry significant weight when you consider the company Finland is keeping: Cuba, Iran, Iraq, North Korea, Libya and Russia are also non-signatories of the Treaty. Finland's excuses for not signing are beginning to look lightweight and embarrassingly hollow; and let's not forget hypocritical.

Top of the excuse list is financial difficulties. When Finland finally signs the Treaty they will be required to start dismantling their stockpiles leaving them to implement a new defence system sans landmines. The Ministry of Defence is claiming that without a suitable replacement the border with Russian would be unprotected and Finns could escape, sorry, I mean that Russians could freely invade. A conservative estimate of 311 million euros has been made by the MOD that would just about

cover the cost of either a new defence or bribing every Russian not to cross the border.

The land border between Finland and Russia extends more than 1300 kilometres and landmines are believed to be an effective defence and deterrent for a country with a long border and extensive territory, and whose defence is based on a conscripted army. Currently, AP landmines are used in approximately six places along the Lapland border, while the remainder are kept in stockpiles, but Finland is even tight-lipped over the quantity they have. It is estimated that there are hundreds of thousands but less than a million; although an anonymous government official revealed that the stockpile is probably bigger than that.

In a report filed by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines it states that no Finnish government or military official has explained to them the practicality of relying on AP mines as border-defence against invasion when the mines are in stockpiles rather than already deployed and Finland has no mass-delivery systems. Should the Russians take leave of their senses and decide to breach Finland's borders the mines would

be placed slowly by hand and could technically be described as 'ineffective'.

Are AP mines an outmoded form of defence? If the military were to acknowledge that they are then it would raise a discussion considerably more uncomfortable than not signing a Treaty – does the Ministry of defence really want to admit that its defence policy is out-dated? It suits them far better to stick to a 311 million euro budget requirement and claim it should not be done before 2012, which is strange since in 2003 Finland had claimed the target to ban landmines was 2006 and finally end their use by 2010.

Finland's current Prime Minister, Matti Vanhanen (Centre) was in the post of Defence Minister last year and he made his standpoint perfectly clear, "During this term we have no resources to replace the mines," before going on to say that there was no intention of giving up the land mines during the present electoral term, which ends in 2007. PM Vanhanen also argued that mines are a threat to nobody save an uninvited intruder – tell that to more than one million people killed or injured by mines since 1975.

Despite Finland's unique po-

sition of being an outsider in international politics and disarmament they are pro-active when it comes to mine action programs. Since 1991, Finland has contributed over €32 million to mine action programs across the world. Last year five million euros funded projects in Afghanistan, Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mozambique, Cambodia and Laos. Since the majority of Finnish landmines are stockpiled and are endangering nobody I believe they should wait 30 years for them to expire and spend a larger percentage of the 311 million euros funding more mine action programs; perhaps a worthier cause than finding a defence against an improbable threat.

Many see Finland as the 'superpower of disarmament' but this is when it is about the strategic weapons of other countries; when it comes to outright cheek they are a superpower in their own right. In the latter half of 1999 Finland held the E.U. Pres-

idency, which required them to deliver the E.U.'s statement in favour of implementing the Mine Ban Treaty to the United Nations - despite being, at the time, the only E.U. member not to have signed.

How Finland continues to get away with the barefaced cheek of this political hypocrisy is something that boggles the mind. It is time to remove the mines lining the border and replace them with barbed wire for all the world cares, then claim you have 20 landmines in your stockpile and leave the rest to deteriorate in Lapland, before finally putting pen to paper and signing the Treaty. Come on Finland, you are undermining the effort to eliminate landmines.

1. Each State Party undertakes never under any circumstances:
  - a) To use anti-personnel mines;
  - b) To develop, produce, otherwise acquire, stockpile, retain or transfer to anyone, directly or indirectly, anti-personnel mines;
  - c) To assist, encourage or induce, in any way, anyone to engage in any activity prohibited to a State Party under this Convention.
2. Each State Party undertakes to destroy or ensure the destruction of all anti-personnel mines in accordance with the prohibitions of this Convention.  
- 1997 Mine Ban Treaty (a.k.a. The Ottawa Treaty)

## Remake the TV series sequel

By Asa Butcher

“And the winner of the 100th Annual Academy Awards Best Picture is...” reveals a 50-year-old Ashton Kutcher, winner of the previous year’s Best Actor award. Have you ever considered what the films nominated for Oscars will be like in 2028? 24 years is only a moment away; consider that in 1980 Kramer vs. Kramer won five Academy Awards and that was 24 years ago.

My concern for quality and original movie making grows every day with the news that yet another TV series is destined for the silver screen or that another classic has been given the green light for a 21st century overhaul, or another screenwriter has cleverly written a prequel or a sequel to an existing franchise. Where will it end, or is there really an end in sight?

Four of the top five summer blockbusters of 2004 were sequels, Shrek 2, Spider-Man 2, Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban and The Bourne Supremacy, while two of the biggest flops were the film version of the cult TV series Thunderbirds and remake of the 1957 Best Picture winner Around the World in Eighty Days. The summer blockbuster is traditionally

a big bang popcorn flick that caters to the escapism crowd, myself included, but none of the aforementioned films were original.

Shrek was based on Grimm Brothers’ Fairytales with plenty of movie references, Spider-Man has its roots in comics, Harry Potter and The Bourne Supremacy are from novels and Around the World was a straight remake. At least The Day After Tomorrow was an original story, sort of, despite paying homage to every disaster movie cliché used in the cliché-ridden Independence Day.

The outlook isn’t any brighter either, with a host of remakes, sequels, prequels all scheduled for release over the coming year. Prepare yourself for Alfie, Assault on Precinct 13 and King Kong remakes, while Indiana Jones, Mission Impossible and Bridget Jones get sequels. Batman and The Exorcist receive prequels and Bewitched, Bridehead Revisited and Knight Rider are leaving the small screen. Lewis Carroll fans can expect a live-action Alice in Wonderland and historical aficionados can complain about the inaccuracies of Alexander, the King of Macedonia, in the forthcoming release.

You may think that all these will be great to watch and I would agree with you. My is-

sue is with the fact that each of these films has taken the funding of an original screenplay because they are the safe option with an established fan base out there. How will you feel when The Godfather is remade with animated animals and remember that Back to the Future is 20 years old next year, which would make it a candidate for updating.

By 2028 the movie technology will have progressed beyond our current imagination but we can only pray that the storytelling won’t be sacrificed to accommodate the latest developments. As long as there are original screenplays, like American Beauty, The Usual Suspects, Hannah and her Sisters, The Sting and Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, being written there is a glimmer of hope for cinema lovers everywhere. Failing that we can always go and watch the holographic remake of Showgirls...

## Kick in the Baltics

By Asa Butcher

Relations between Estonia and Finland go back thousands of years, even the tune to their national anthems are the same and when Estonia regained its independence in 1991 the first official visit of their president was to Finland. The recent addition of Estonia to the European Union has made Finland sit up and realise the economic threat that their close neighbour poses.

Estonia’s arrival on the EU stage could be the kick up the arse that Finland needs to start reinventing itself. “The past couple of years have been perhaps steps backwards,” states Risto Penttilä, “If you look at the opinion polls that we do, there’s a sense of wanting to isolate oneself from the world again, rather than being part of it and there is a lesser willingness to be active in foreign policy or economic policy.”

Risto is the Director of the Elinkeinoelämän Valtuuskunta (EVA, or Finnish Business and Policy Forum) in Helsinki and they are responsible for looking at issues to do with Finland’s competitiveness

and the well-being of Finland’s success, which deals with issues of taxation and economic policy. They also look at Finland in the world, both within the European Union and on a global scale.

“I see Tallinn and Helsinki merging into twin cities. It’s a wonderful opportunity and it will influence southern Finland a great deal. People shouldn’t be defensive, they should be thinking about how they can get the most out of it, and that doesn’t mean that only Finland stands to benefit, Estonians can also benefit,” Risto believes. He wants to take the best of Finland and the best of Estonia and experiment by combining the two models. “In thinking about developing Finland they should be learning from Estonians, trying to achieve what Estonia has achieved in a very short time scale.”

“When it comes to Estonia, it is great to have a country that has taken a different path and is competition between two systems. Estonia is luring our companies and even individuals with its lower taxation, we should think that if Finland has a great system and is a great country, and it has become that by paying higher taxes, then

is it working if people are leaving?” asks Risto.

“I would encourage people to think of possibilities in Estonia and Estonian companies here; have some of the production in Estonia and have some here. I think they both will benefit from allowing free exchange between the two countries, so I’m not worried. It’s nice to have one of the fastest growing economies in Europe located so near to us. I’m not particularly worried about that at all.”

Dear Asa,

Hope you're over your hangover by the time you read this. My initial plan for the Dear John/Dear Asa column was to just use a catch-all response to cover all the bewilderment my country causes the international community; it was to read, "I'm with stupid." But then I realized I would, hopefully, only be stuck with George W. till November, at which point I'd have to think of something else. Besides, the perceived problem of our high drinking age (as compared to the legal age for voting, driving and enlisting) is one of the predicaments that our fearless leader did not get us into. It's been a hot topic since he was just a tough-talkin' punk at Yale. In fact, our government lowered the drinking age to 18 during the Vietnam War. That's right my friend, it turns out that you're not the first person to argue that those deemed old enough to handle war are also old enough to survive a hangover.

However, the legal age was raised again as soon as drunk

driving fatalities started to skyrocket (we suffered a rise of nearly 20 percent among 18-20 year-olds). Drunk drivers, Vietnam, and psychedelic drugs... what a dangerous time to be a teen!

You see the thing of it is Asa, the real issue here is not drinking; it's driving. I completely agree with you on the point that you Brits are just as irresponsible when it comes to consumption (especially after seeing what you can do to a case of Newcastle Ale). The difference is, after you go out and get plastered you take the subway or bus home to sleep it off. If I had to depend on public transportation to get me to and from the bar, I'd end up spending most of my nights alone, stuck at the bus station. Where do think George Thoroughgood and the Destroyers got the inspiration for their breakthrough hit, "I Drink Alone"? Well, Georgie-boy, being the starving artist that he was at the time, probably couldn't afford a car and spent one too many nights drinking alone at the bus waiting for the #6, apparently something millions of Ameri-

cans could relate to considering the success of the album!

Anyway, the thing of it is, a teen's social life rides on four wheels here in the US. We didn't gain our freedom from your bloody queen only to be held captive by our own shitty public transportation. Our affection for our vehicles and appreciation for the social freedom they provide are evident in the size of our rims (I'll be you're not rollin' on 40's you bus-riding Brit).

But we have no other choice you see. Unless you're in a huge city like New York or Chicago, chances are that public transportation just can't get you where you need to go. We got a lot of room over here and have come up with a little thing called "urban sprawl" to fill it up.

Take my hometown of St. Cloud, MN for example. Over 100,000 friendly Minnesotans drive themselves to work each day, and almost no one knows how to use the bus system. The ones that do ride the bus only do so because they can't afford car insurance or obtain a

license because of health issues. Why the aversion to public transportation? Well let's say you have a few errands to run... you need some noodles for the casserole, paint for da boat and some new socks to go with your summer sandals. That trip probably requires at least 3 transfers since the grocery, hardware and clothing stores are all spread out around the city... it's not like you can fit a "superstore" downtown, doncha-know.

As you can see my friend, your confusion over our comparatively high drinking age is a symptom of a much larger problem. While drunk teens shave cats, light bags of shit on fire, and get pregnant. Drunk teens with cars kill people. With our endless miles of highways, the learning curve is just too steep here to expect kids to learn to both drive and drink responsibly during the same unstable post-pubescent years.

Ideally we would increase the drinking age and lower the drinking age. But without adequate public transportation to get us around this is just not plausible. And as long as "I'm with stupid" and all his oil-industry henchmen, our naïve ro-

mance with the automobile industry will surely continue.

Hope this helps quell your confusion, at least till next month.

Drinking alone at the bus station,

John

**‘Wow!’**

By Asa Butcher

9,398 days have passed since December 22nd 1978; a warm winter’s day in Chichester that marked my debut on this planet. Approximately 3,000 days have been wasted sleeping, countless days have been spent in the bathroom and not enough days have been spent with my wife. During those 6,000 days awake, how many times have I seen a world changing moment that made me exclaim, “Wow!”?

My personal definition of a ‘wow moment’ needs to meet the following criteria: you need to have experienced and understood it the moment it happened, like watching the moon landing or Live Aid. You need to have been a part of a craze or fashion the first time it appeared, like The Beatles, Elvis or Star Wars. You were part of a generation to witness technological discoveries, like flight, television or even horseless carriages.

Some of these become ‘wow moments’ in retrospect but they are experiences that nobody else could ever go through, unless they had a DeLorean with flux capacitor. My point is that today there are fewer and fewer opportunities for these moments because they no longer come as a surprise. We expect faster cars, trains and planes, we sim-

ply wait for the next computer hardware upgrade, travel into space is no longer deemed news worthy and musicians are heavily influenced by past musical genres.

What’s left that can be original and awe-inspiring? Perhaps one of the areas that still impresses me are cinema special effects, but the danger of directors, such as George Lucas, adding new scenes, characters and backgrounds with the latest sfx developments means that our nostalgia is being distorted.

Perhaps I am being pessimistic or just had a bad night’s sleep – which happens occasionally out of 3,000 – but I feel cheated out of the good stuff. I was awoken with the news that Princess Diana had died but was too young to enjoy the Royal Wedding, I wasn’t born for Neil Armstrong’s walk but saw the Challenger explode, my Dad tells me about the great days of 1970’s football but I only recall Hillsborough, the Bradford City fire and the pain England’s football team regularly causes.

There was news recently that many people my age are hooked on nostalgia. They are watching DVDs of favourite childhood shows, they are remixing hits of the 80s and 90s, there are crazes like Rubik’s Cube and Gameboys making comebacks, and let’s not even mention fashion. Is

this desperate grab for our past inspired by an uninspired future or an unsurprising future? Cloning will happen, flights from UK to Oz in two hours will happen, cures will happen, wars will happen, things will always happen, but that is no surprise – is it?

Today we have clichés, we have Elvis impersonators, we have Michael Schumacher making history but most are too annoyed to notice and my football team still have not won anything for decades. ‘Wow moments’ may be very rare but I suppose if they did happen all the time then they wouldn’t be so, err, wow, would they? If you want three, then the ones that immediately come to mind are the 1999 solar eclipse, Greece winning Euro 2004 and proposing to Päivi. That should a few people happy...