DIT News, 1st.-30th. of November, 2009

DIT:Students Union

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Poll finds finances top concern for students

By Cliona Ward & Fionnuala Holohan

A new survey carried out by DIT News found that the greatest cause of stress for students in DIT is money. Thirty-five per cent of students polled told DIT News that financial concerns are causing them the most worry, and cited a lack of part-time jobs, concerns over graduating into a bleak job market and worries over cuts to maintenance grants as their top concerns.

One student who took part in the anonymous poll remarked "I'm in fourth year now and I just don’t know if I'm going to get a job after this. I've put in so much hard work and I don’t know if it's going to mean anything when I graduate and there's no work for me. It's really depressing really!"

Another student said "I'm worried about my grant; I didn't get my repeat results this year until after we started back so my application's been delayed and I'm worried I might not get it this year and next year it might not be as much because of the budget. It's a really difficult year this one".

Financial concerns are not the only worry causing students stress. The pressures of college took second spot on the poll of student worries, with 15% of those polled stating that deadlines and exams are causing them great deals of stress. "We're under so much more pressure this year until after we started back so my application's been delayed and I'm worried I might not get it this year and next year it might not be as much because of the budget. It's a really difficult year this one".

Financial concerns are not the only worry causing students stress. The pressures of college took second spot on the poll of student worries, with 15% of those polled stating that deadlines and exams are causing them great deals of stress. "We're under so much more pressure this year" noted one participant, “we don’t have the same facilities, or even the same amount of hours, and we’re still supposed to produce the same results as last year’s class”.

The recent closure of all the fitness facilities in college took third place in the survey with 11% stating they’re worried that their health and fitness may suffer as a result and that they may have lost these facilities for good.

The newly elevated registration fee took 4% of the poll. “Its €1,500, that’s a lot of money, and I know that €600 of that goes straight back to the Government, its robbery” stated one student surveyed.

Participants highlighted problems with the campus wifi and computer facilities as a source of stress, with 5% saying they were concerned about the service.

The diminishing library service was responsible for a further 5% of answers “I go to Mountjoy Square” one student told DIT News “and I’ve heard rumours we’re going to lose our library altogether, I can’t go trekking back and forth to Bolton St every time I want some quiet study time.”

Transport took 4% of poll results, with students worrying about getting to college and getting between the 32 DIT buildings scattered across the city. Fortunately for those polled, the new poll bike scheme launched by DIT this month might ease their worries. Bikes can be hired from the Student’s Union offices on campus and used for free.

The administration in DIT was the cause of the remaining 4% of worried answers with students complaining of not receiving results until after they started term and delays in registration. One mechanical engineering student told us “I get that they’re under pressure because of the cuts but it shouldn’t mean that people didn’t know if they should even be attending classes at the start of the year. I’m sure some people came back to class and then found out they hadn’t passed. It’s mad really”.

Money, money, money

Win €20 in our new Super Fun Quiz
A word from the Editor...

This month was a busy one for the DIT News staff. Apart from collecting news and photographs, we carried out a poll on what issues concern students most.

Unsurprisingly money topped our poll with a you quaking in your boots about the job front and scared about grant cuts. All we can hope for is to stay active, be engaged, be aware of what’s going on in your campus or in Leinster House. Knowledge is power here folks.

To keep things a bit more cheerful however, we ask the all important question: Do you like John & Edward. A whole forty percent of you HATE them, thirty seven percent LOVE them and almost a quarter of you don’t know who they are (get your head out from under that rock!)

On a more serious note, I was really saddened to hear about an incident that happened to our academic colleagues in UCD. Societies on campus have been fined €5000 for calling an event ‘The Virgin Ball’.

The penalty was given because the Recognition Committee of Societies Council and Academic Council in UCD found the title “in breach of the basic standards of propriety and consideration”.

I think we should be grateful to DIT for not imposing such ridiculous penalties on our societies, all of which are the life-blood of this campus.

Enjoy your reading this month, we’ve some interesting travel pieces, great opinion, plenty of news and DEnt is looking better than ever!

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It is the policy of DIT News to correct any inaccuracies as soon as they occur. Any corrections or clarifications will be printed in the next edition of the newspaper.

It is also the policy of DIT News to offer the right of reply to any person who feels aggrieved by any comment or opinion contained within.

Please forward any such comments to the Editor.
Bacik shows support for DIT students

By Glenn Fitzpatrick

On November 3rd DIT’s Labour Youth Society welcomed Senator Ivana Bacik and USI Vice-President Dan O’Neill in for a talk on cutbacks and how they affect the DIT campuses in particular. The evening was full of healthy discussion and brought home some serious issues that face third level institutions in this current economic climate.

Ivana herself is a Reid Professor of Criminal Law, Criminology and Penology at Trinity College Dublin and is a radical voice in the Seanad. She has openly criticized the blows dealt to education as a result of An Bord Snip and she was quick to point out that DIT has been more severely affected than most. A prime example of this is that the HEA embargo includes replacing full time staff on paid leave. Opinions in the Dail differ incredibly from the voices in the room. There is mass cursing when we are told that Minister Lenihan does not consider Librarians to be academic staff.

One attendee failed to see how it added up, given that capitation fees have increased by two thirds for this academic year. She stated that having paid more this year it wouldn’t be unfair of us to expect more services and Ivana stated that it was unfortunate that we can’t even seem to retain the services we had last year. What students don’t know is that when capitation fees increase, the funding that the institutes receive is actually decreased so it balances out; a phenomenon being referred to as ‘fees through the back door’.

The crowd was made aware of speculation from inside Dail Eireann that there is a cutback on maintenance grants on the way in order to increase savings at the Department of Education. This would present people from lower working class areas with another barrier to access. When asked if there is any sympathy towards people looking for a degree from within the Seanad Ivana stated that there was less sympathy towards us and prospective students than there is for issues facing primary schools. She urged students to make their concerns known to their local Tds, with her message remaining simple; stay active, defiant and make your voice heard.

USI VP Dan O’Neill reminded those gathered that the USI has been continuously arguing for a need to invest in education in order to tackle the recession. The crowd voiced concerns that there is a conception that students don’t care. When asked what the most effective means of a voice would be he put it plainly; TD’s only understand votes as a currency and if students don’t vote in numbers then students will be trampled on.

“We have an amazing opportunity to start afresh. I meet so many people today that don’t believe in anything. While you are here for 3 or 4 years it is pivotal that you put forward your ideas that can change the country. If you don’t, no one else will.”

Having spoken with Green Party Leader John Gormley, Dan told the group that it remains clear that ‘fees through the back door’ may soon be the only alternative. Minister Gormley has stressed that if capitation fees do go up that it is not as damaging as if full fees were reintroduced.

DIT gets green and healthy

By Andy McFarlane

Currently, only 1 in 10 students or staff of DIT cycle to work, with only another one in ten walking despite the fact that over half the staff and student population live within 10km’s of their college.

As a result, a new group formally set up on the same day as the President, Prof. Brian Norton signed the Smarter Travel Workplace Charter aims to tackle the problem head-on by encouraging both staff and students alike to move towards more sustainable travel primarily through cycling and walking.

The plan is to get at least 4% of the student population and 6% of the staff population to change their ways, in a bid that would see 230,000 car trips or 414,000kg’s of carbon emissions removed from Dublin per year.

The group will be looking at ways to encourage this such as the provision of bicycle locking facilities throughout DIT, negotiating discounts for students at local bike shops, competitions, and a Pool Bike scheme, a bike hire program akin to the Dublinbikes scheme but just for DIT staff and students.

Already, we’ve seen covered bike spaces being made available at Mountjoy Sq. and secure parking being provided for students at Cathal Brugha St. Aside from that, discounts have already been negotiated with four bike shops so far throughout Dublin just for DIT students! And that’s all just for starters...

Following on from what’s been done so far and what we have in the pipeline, we’ll be continually looking at other ways to make cycling and walking to DIT across all the sites more attractive and this is where you come in.

If you think you might be interested in joining the group, have an interest in sustainable travel or there’s something that’s been putting you off cycling or walking to DIT, then we want to hear from you! Get in touch by contacting Sinead McNulty at sinead.mcnullty@dit.ie and hopefully we’ll see you soon!
Trekking stars do it for Oxfam

By Derek Grant

Every summer thousands of students are given almost four months holidays. Many have to find work, some do. Others find themselves sitting at home playing video games or with their families on vacation. Another choice, few think off, is volunteer work.

This summer was my second year volunteering for Oxfam and it was lots of fun. I had the opportunity to meet people from all over the world and we enjoyed some fundraising events through the summer. The most recent was the Trailtrekker event. The Oxfam Trailtrekker was originally a military exercise organised by British Army Gurkhas in 1981 but this year was Oxfam Ireland’s first Trailtrekker event, and will be held annually.

The Trailtrekker is a 100km long, 30 hour event. All teams are organized into groups of four, with each team organizing a support crew to provide extra food and anything else the team might need at the checkpoints. This year, 93 teams participated with just under 370 walkers. Our local shop, Oxfam George’s Street, organized a team for the event, the Startrekkers, and I was at hand to help them out.

We arrived in Carlingford on a bright Saturday afternoon and after spotting the Startrekkers, walked with them to the next checkpoint at Camlough. Walking uphill from the Lough we were blessed with the sun. We waited with them at the checkpoint while they took a break and, when the team was ready they set off again. This time alone.

At 8am we left again to find our friends. We arrived at the checkpoint with the morning mist, there had been light drizzle during the night and we hoped the team was bearing it well. Two of their members had unfortunately not made it, one was put out by illness and the other suffered a knee injury. The remaining two were very tired, and sad to lose two of their teammates.

When they finally arrived at Carlingford’s Moy Centre it could not have been too soon. 28 hours and 23 minutes. They were exhausted. But they did arrive to music, medals and a massage from some “Brazilian” masseuse. The ultimate reward for people with so charitable a heart they could walk a hundred kilometres.

The next event organized on behalf of Oxfam International is Oxjam. If you are interested in volunteering or if you have a band and they are interested in helping a good cause, please call 1800-60-60-65. Check out the Oxfam Ireland website for details on gigs and venues.

Overcoming coming out!

By Gillian Middleton

If you are a homosexual, bisexual or transgendered person you may at some stage in your life feel like mentioning this to someone; this is called coming out.

Unfortunately, it’s not all that it used to be. Gone are the parental reactions that True Movies are made of. More often than not it’s a case of ‘well, obviously!’ or ‘damn, my money was on your brother.’

You may find after all of the stress and anxiety over how people will react, the only person who is bothered by it is you.

The anti-climax can be a little disheartening; but mother, don’t you want to call the priest and have him cast out my demons or something? Also, she’d rather go back to watching Fair City.

Coming out will not make you any taller, funnier (why does Gillian have two i’s? so Gillian can see! shut up, I’m hilarious) or more attractive but it will, more than likely, make you feel more comfortable with yourself and give you an new perspective on other people.

Grant cuts could cause student sicknesses

By Cliona Ward

Proposed cuts to student maintenance grants will result in unhealthy diets and long-term health problems.

This is according to Healthy Food for All (HFfA), which last month published findings from a scientific study by the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) in relation to the affordability of healthy diets for those on a low-income.

The report found that it is up to 10 times cheaper to provide calories in the form of unhealthy foods which are high in fat, salt and sugar, than from healthy alternatives such as fruit, vegetables, lean meat and fish.

The study also found that the choice of places to shop in communities has a big impact on dietary choice, with local convenience stores being up to twice as expensive for the purchase of healthy foods.

According to Marie Moonen, Chair of HFfA, cuts would put a healthy diet even further out of reach for financially challenged students.

“Government policy must address the financial and other barriers to healthy eating,” she said.

“We know that a healthy diet helps to prevent heart disease, stroke, cancers and obesity and [everyone has] a right to food that provides adequate nutrition and protection against common diseases. Furthermore, by ensuring that [students] have access to healthy foods, we could save the Government – and ultimately the taxpayer – money in the longer term.”

Dance Announcement

Dance soc have classes on mondays 7-8 on mondays and 6.30-8.30 on wednesdays in larkin college

Breakdance classes are mondays 8-9 in larkin college and 5-6.30 on wednesdays in kevin street sports hall.
Dead bikes reborn in DIT pool bike scheme

By Fionnuala Holohan

The DIT Pool Bike Scheme was officially launched on the 29th of October by the Minister for Transport, Noel Dempsey.

This scheme will provide refurbished bicycles for DIT staff and students for travel between the DIT campuses. It forms part of the action plan from the DIT Smarter Travel Working Group, which has been set-up to address commuting and travel challenges.

These refurbished bicycles are abandoned bicycles that have been recovered from the streets of Dublin and made road-worthy with the help of local bike shops. 18 bicycles in total will be made available for the scheme, 7 of which have already been delivered, with approximately 5 more to follow mid-November.

Speaking at the event, Mr Dempsey commended DIT for showing the way on low-cost solutions to environmental issues. "It is hugely important that we continue to shift attitudes and people away from private transport and onto more sustainable forms of travel," he said, "and we can’t get out of our current difficulties without imagination and leaps of faith of this nature".

He praised the leadership and innovation shown by DIT and expressed his delight at being present at Aungier Street to launch the scheme, which he described as “simple, effective and self-starting”.

Brian Gormley, the manager of Campus Life and head of the Smarter Travel Working Group in DIT, noted that 69% of staff and 86% students currently use sustainable travel, mainly public transport and that 30% of staff and students travel between campuses weekly with 10% travelling daily. The DIT Pool Bike Scheme is aimed to help these travellers in an environmentally-friendly way.

Jen Jordan, vice-president of the DIT Students’ Union, currently cycles to college each day, as do her colleagues Sean Campbell and Tracey Flinter. “Cycling around town is faster, better for you, better for the environment and cheaper than any public transport” Jen said, “plus... in the upcoming welfare week if you cycle to college we’ll give you free stuff for your effort... so you’ve nothing to lose get on your bikes!”

Further action is being planned in terms of safety classes, promotional events and car-sharing website.

Details for how to avail of the new scheme will be provided by the Students Union shortly.

Mature students decide to DOSS

By Bob O’Mhurcu

After getting off to a flying start during the Clubs & Socs Festival, where over 130 members signed up, we’ve gone from strength to strength! We held our first event of the year on the 8th of October, where an intrepid troupe went bowling. We also held our rain-soaked AGM where this year’s committee were elected, so say congrats to Fionnuala, Derek, Niall and Izabela agreed to take the reins for 2009/10.

The first thing the new committee decided to do was change the name of the society - “Mature Students Society” seemed a bit fuddy-duddy, so we are now officially the “DIT Old Skool Society" or D.O.S.S for short! AND we’re getting hoodies made up for our members, which you can buy for a measly €15. Drop us a line at ditmaturesoc@gmail.com to order yours. We’ll be announcing the winner of our hoodie slogan competition soon too - the student who comes up with the best slogan for the society wins a free hoodie, so watch your emails!

Our usual flurry of coffee mornings is ongoing, and loads of members have taken the opportunity to come along, grab a coffee and a free sambo and have a natter. Keep an eye on your emails for our next one.

Christmas is coming, so naturally we are going Ice Skating - we’ll be hitting the RDS for 7up on Ice on Saturday 5th December at 6:50pm. We’ve got FREE tickets for the first 40 students to sign up, and we still have a few spaces left. Be sure to drop us a line at ditmaturesoc@gmail.com to book your place!

That’s it for now, but we have much more planned for next semester - just watch this space...
Karzai crowned in contested election

By Jennifer O'Riordan

In 2009, can we really accept the outcome of the recent Afghan Presidential election and think of Hamid Karzai as a rightful leader?

Given the highly questionable election, the speculated ballot stuffing, and supposed intimidation of voters at sparsely located polling stations can we really regard his appointment, after the cancelling of the run-off with Abdullah Abdullah, as an appropriate outcome?

The powers of the West seem to think so. Last week, world leaders such as US President Barack Obama and UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown recognised the Pashtuns appointment, congratulated him and then followed up their congratulations with stern warnings that he had “a lot of work to do”. While its hard to see how the situation could have been resolved without more unnecessary expense and bloodshed - it still feels like a kick in the teeth.

The whole thing reeks of defeat. Defeat to the Taliban who stepped up their relentless attacks on civilians, army personnel and anyone trying to facilitate the democratic process. Defeat of the establishment of the Afghan people's right to choose. Defeat of progress.

A quick breakdown of what happened; In August of this year, Afghanistan, with the help of the UN, planned to hold election for a new President. Hamid Karzai, who had a lot of work to do, was the best candidate to lead where the Afghan people could decide for themselves, he was the best candidate to lead the Interim Administration of Afghanistan.

Under the 2001 Bonn Agreement, both high-ranking Afghan leaders and the West deemed Karzai, like many Afghans had supported the Taliban, the most suitable man for the job. Until a level of stability was reached in the country, the Afghan people could decide for themselves, he was the best candidate to lead the Interim Administration of Afghanistan.

While in their offensive against the Soviet forces during the 1980's, Karzai, like many Afghans had supported the Taliban, he had since shown great disdain for the militant group - who were supposedly responsible for the assassination of his own father Ahmad Karzai in 1999. Hamid Karzai came out the winner with an overall share of 55.4% of the vote.

However, straightaway, and even during the election, concerns were raised at the validity of the result. Speculation arose as to whether or not the election had been conducted fairly and whether or not Karzai had truly won it. Reports of intimidation, ballot stuffing, and general mal-practice at several levels flooded in.

The IED (Independent Election Commission), a UN led panel, had little choice but to hold an investigation into the election, and decide if Karzai could in fact be officially declared President. After the investigation, it declared that there had been substantial electoral fraud and the fairest and most 'democratic' solution was for a run-off to take place between Karzai and his nearest competition Abdullah Abdullah.

The date was set for November 7th. The Afghan people would again go to the polls and attempt to elect their leader. It was like 'Déjà vu' really. A similar sequence of events had also taken place in 2004. A presidential election was held, Karzai came out with a majority, questions were raised, and a run-off was held. Only this time Karzai was officially declared President from the results of the supposedly less corrupt run-off.

Great things were expected of him back in 2004. He had more or less governed the country since the US backed Northern Alliance had overthrown the Taliban in 2001. Under the 2001 Bonn Agreement, both high-ranking Afghan leaders and the West deemed him the most suitable man for the job. Until a level of stability was reached in the country, the Afghan people could decide for themselves, he was the best candidate to lead the Interim Administration of Afghanistan.

While in their offensive against the Soviet forces during the 1980's, Karzai, like many Afghans had supported the Taliban, he had since shown great disdain for the militant group - who were supposedly responsible for the assassination of his own father Abdul Ahad Karzai in 1999. He appeared committed to doing whatever was in his power to help weaken the organisation.

Unfortunately, little changed in Afghanistan during his first five-year term as President. Conditions for Afghan civilians in some areas improved only marginally and corruption spread through his cabinet rendering it farcical in the eyes of many. As vicious and often indiscriminate as ever, the Taliban stepped up their offensive in a conflict, now eight years old, whose monthly death toll is higher now than ever before.

And so, it is hard to blame many Afghans for their anger and discontent at the events of last week. There was something so despairing about Abdullah Abdullah’s withdrawal from the run-off just days before it was due to take place. It was as if in the face of all the adversity their last beacon or hope for change had given up. His emotional withdrawal statement where he cited concerns that a fair ballot would not take place only drove home just how difficult and remote a prospect democracy, as we know it, is for Afghanistan.

With no opposition, the IED were left with little choice but to cancel the futile run-off and officially declare Karzai president. Even with the world watching, the US and UK putting pressure on Karzai to change and 'forcefully move forward', its hard to be optimistic and see the next five years in Afghanistan being radically different from the last five.
Chomsky
The world’s greatest mind lets us pick his brain

PJ Gallagher shows his love for the 80s

Sen. David Norris tells us about his nimble days
Hello and welcome to the November issue of DEnt magazine...

This month we have a veritable feast of interviews, reviews and comment for you to feast on...

Our cover star, none other than world renowned intellect Noam Chomsky met one of the DEnt staff earlier this month for a chinwag on all things global crisis have a peek on page 6...

But don’t think that having one of the greatest minds on earth to talk to is enough for DEnt...

This month we also caught up with Irish funnyman PJ Gallagher and the equally funny Senator David Norris on page three...

We’ve added our super fun fun competition page where you can lay your hands on twenty bucks (pg 9)...

All the latest music releases have been reviewed for your pleasure on page 5...

The Dublin gig scene is poured over with a fine toothed comb on page 10 and we have a look at new movies on page eleven...

For a look at fashion, photography, art, food, music, movies, theatre, culture and more here's DEnt

This month's featured photographer is: Gill Prenderville

Gill Prenderville is in her third year studying photography. She has become engrossed in creating more conceptual images using the camera to make abstract versions of reality and representing the world in an unconventional way.

In this display the top photo is from a triptych from a series on the constructed portrait of a person.

The centre two photos are part of the series under the heading “Irish Identity in the 21st Century”. The photographs tell a story of how Ireland has come from what it used to be, to what it is now.

The bottom shot is of the band Miracle Bell.

In 2007, Gill organized and produced her first photography exhibition in Naas, Co. Kildare, with much success. Currently, she is striving to broaden her horizons, and get her work further afield.
PJ Gallagher has fast become one of Ireland’s favourite comedians, famous for taking a tired candid camera formula and injecting it with freshness, verve, audacity and everyday Dublin wit. The impish comedian is currently touring, and will be back in Vicar Street on December 5th. He’s also just released a new DVD of his live show called ‘Just Jokes’.

When were you happiest and why?
I was working in a warehouse just after leaving school and that’s where I met Jason Byrne. We never did any work and we were drunk most times and it was the best fun I ever had. Funny enough that place is closed down now, we both work as comedians and I don’t drink at all now.

What is your greatest fear?
Flying, I hate planes with a passion, they have always scared me and I don’t think I’ll ever get over it. I’ve tried everything from hypnotists to expensive courses where they show you how the plane works and every time I do one I actually get worse. I still fly whenever I have to but the people that make Valium have a poster of me on their wall by now.

Which living person do you most admire and why?
Probably my mate Ger, he’s a Dublin Fireman, he’s always in a good mood and no matter what he does he’s really good at it without being a cock about it.

What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?
I’m a nervous wreck and it takes a million years for me to make a decision about anything. I must drive everyone I know mental.

What is the trait you most deplore in others?
Liars. That’s a crime that deserves shooting.

What is your favourite book/work of art/piece of music?
The God Delusion, Richard Dawkins is the book, not much in to art at all really and I love all kinds of music. My iPod is a testament to a very confused ear.

What is the worst job you’ve ever had?
I got a job that had something to do with air conditioning where I had to sit in an attic with a meter that I didn’t know what it did writing down any numbers that came up on it on a piece of paper. While doing all this I had to wear a big white spacesuit type thing and sit on my own for nearly 10 hours a day. Hell on Earth that was and I still have no idea what the point of it is.

What has been your biggest disappointment or regret?
Being in the room while I had to get my dog put down. I would do anything to take that memory out of my head.

If you could go back in time, where would you go?
The 80’s! I only caught the tail end of them but they were deadly. Never mind all the folks that said it was rubbish. It was brilliant and the TV was so ridiculous you’d smile all day. I still love all that music too.

What single thing would improve the quality of your life?
Well it’s now I’m a bit cold so a warmer jacket would put me back up to 100%.

What single thing would improve the quality of your life?
If I was to be Naked Camera I suppose. I was struggling to do anything at all right in my life until that came along and then my life changed so much I still can’t really keep up. It’s the reason people come to my comedy shows and it still makes me laugh when I see pics of people dressed as the characters for Halloween and stuff so that wins hands down really.

What keeps you awake at night?
Everything. I am a terrible sleeper. My head is always going 100 miles an hour so I find it hard to even lie down most of the time. Obviously if I have to get on a plane the next day I don’t sleep well, I get nervous before a gig so I don’t sleep too good then either and if I am racing the next day

Where would you most like to be right now?
Putting on a helmet and getting ready to ride a motorcycle on a Spanish racetrack. I love bikes more than anything. Four wheels move the body but two wheels move the soul.

Of course Joyce but currently the Shadow of the Wind by Ruiz Zigron. Music, Chopin C sharp Minor Waltz

What is the worst job you’ve ever had?
Unpaid quiz master on RTE pilot programme. It was a disaster from the beginning to the end and I am very honoured to say it has achieved a listing in the 100 worst television programmes ever made.

What is your greatest fear?
Suddenly snapping into consciousness in the middle of the National Concert Hall in front of a microphone with a very large audience and having no idea what else or what the event is or what I am supposed to be saying.

Which living person do you most admire and why?
Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?
Self importance

What is the trait you most deplore in others?
Same as in others i.e. self importance.

What is your favourite book/work of art/piece of music?

Sen David Norris In a New York State of Mind

By Fionnuala Holohan

When were you happiest and why?
With the people I love anywhere.

That is your greatest fear?
Suddenly snapping into consciousness in the middle of the National Concert Hall in front of a microphone with a very large audience and having no idea what else or what the event is or what I am supposed to be saying.

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What is your favourite book/work of art/piece of music?
Thou shalt not crave thy neighbour

By Susan Ryan

If you are at all interested in fantasy fiction the name Edward Cullen will mean something to you. If you are young or female the name Edward Cullen will mean something entirely different.

The cult craze has deemed vampires to be sexy, sleek creatures of the night. And the Twilight crew are leading the pack. Fans across the country have boarded the train to Twilight Mania as the second movie adaptation will be premiered next Friday, 20th November.

This vampire obsession is a recurring fad for adults and teenagers alike. Dating back to Bram Stoker's Dracula - the quintessential vampire novel - the public has endured a long-standing love affair with the dark figures of the underworld.

I remember the freakish frenzy among crazed girls my age when the heartthrob-esque 'Angie' (David Bowonan) burst onto our screens in the '97 series Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Every week we would congregate in the cafeteria to discuss and swoon over the latest installment, or fix I should call it.

There were often evenings of group participation, an organised gathering of giggly fanatics scrunching at the TV and displaying dreamy eyed sentiments toward the male leads. Joss Whedon's hit show tackled real life teenage problems with one difference: Buffy's 'problems' literally became monsters.

Buffy's success led to a multitude of tie-in products and soon enough entire homes were crammed with images, comics and video games adorning the pretty blonde's deceptively innocent-looking face. Sure enough, as all trends do, the following fizzle and Sunnydale High school closed its doors to its dwindling viewers.

Fast forward five years and the blood-sucking beasts are again on the prowl in mainstream culture. This time around, it seems, they are here to stay. Be it bursting into flames, or sparkling like diamonds in the sun, the perks of the vampire nature fascinate us.

Stephenie Meyer's internationally successful Twilight novels have been consumed by millions of avid fantasy readers across the globe. There are dozens of websites and blogs dedicated to her Hardcore fans.

With the thrill of the upcoming movie we have been hit with posters, billboards and adverts doing the image of three handsome, fit looking youths staring us square in the face. Cinemas around the country booked up dates over the weekend for the showing of Twilight: New Moon. Hats off to the promotional staff, they have certainly delivered.

For some reason we cannot get enough of the magical, mysterious, whimsical world of the supernatural and what it represents; our darker, devious side. Meyer's accomplishment proves this.

Although the gothic books may not be well written, nor intellectually stimulating, the characters Meyer has created and the double lives they lead in the small town of Forks adhere to the imaginative suggestion that we all secretly crave that kind of dangerous, obsessive excitement.

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DIT SVP Society

By David Phelan

Not much can be said for the Irish music scene, we're forcing fed a diet of indie-by-numbers bollocks like Delorentos, the people at the top would have you think The Corrs are worthy of Oxygen and then there's those that continue to keep The Blizzards in business by going to one of their oft held shows.

Friends, it was not always like this nor will it be forever more as such. Instead of latching onto what those in far off lands are doing or merely opening the NME and finding out how to get famous fast with no discernible talent, a new crop is emerging with the intent of making Ireland once again the music strong-hold it used to be.

O Emperor are one of those bands that have honed their own sound, devoid of foreign influence and a Topman sheen, they wander through the realms of music effortlessly, realities that most 'acclaimed' artists in this country are fearful of plundering upon. Their debut single 'Po' is that de-facto of creativity and innovation not to mention being a shockingly brilliant tune.

Other acts on the live scene include Triple Drop, an act so buzzing with life, vibrancy and virility that one can't help but sink into a frenzy as the dubby tunes take hold. If you're fed up with the same rubbish that foreign A&R men think Irish people like, go to a bloody gig and don't stay at home listening to mediocre drivel we should never have had to settle for in the first place.
Lungs - Florence and the Machine
DGC/Interscope
By Todd Ryan

Florence burst onto the music scene in June 2008 with the up-tempo and pure festival tune ‘Kiss with a Fist’. Although the song didn’t storm through the charts (reaching a measly 51), it did wonders for Florence who was included in the festival season at Glastonbury, Electric Picnic and Oxegen.

At the time of her performance at Oxegen, the song ‘Cosmic Love’ was used in the advert for the O2, Dublin. The success of the song and the knock-out performance made the already anticipated album Lungs a huge commercial and critical success when it was released in July 2009. The album boasts amazing backing music from the Machine (Florence's band) and a horn solo at the end of ‘Cosmic Love’ just shows how alternative this new act really is.

It is, however, Florence Welch’s vocals that really make this album stand out. The confident lyrics mix spectacularly with her soaring and declamatory vocal range. The singer beautifully screams and wails through songs like ‘Dog Days Are Over’ and ‘Drown Song’/ ‘For songs like ‘Girl with One Eye’ and ‘I’m Not Calling You A liar’ you can hear the vulnerability in her vocals which show how personal this album really is to the London girl of Irish descent.

The album hosts sounds from Florence that echo Kate Bush and Björk to perfection however the punchy ‘Kiss with a Fist’ shows an Ida Maria meets The Gossip side of Florence that she carries out amazingly. The song ‘Girl with One Eye’ starts with Welch’s voice in soft mood and a delicate string piece and leads into a more up-tempo sound with Florence going on a vocal rollercoaster which she executes perfectly.

The newest single to be physically released, a cover of The Source feat. Camu Statically’s ‘You’re my number one’, shows off the flame haired singer’s vocal heights like no other. The song is a beautiful piece of music all the way through and is the perfect match for this tasty beautiful cake. It is hard not to feel a bit scared even bullied by the album on first listen, but amongst the rattle of harp strings, crashing of drums and flurry of piano a strong and musically educated singer emerges.

Florence has managed to define her own style; voice and music direction in her debut album which among a herd of new acts this year makes the singer stand out. This alternative attitude will make sure the album runs from strength to strength and hopefully will allow her to keep belting out musical masterpieces like Lungs.

Julian Casablancas - Phrazes for the Young
DGC/Interscope
By David Phelan

After 4 years out of the spotlight save for a few notable collaborations, a newly sober Julian Casablancas returns less his band. While NinoElyse and Albert Hammond Jr. have drawn critical acclaim with their own contributions, it is fair to say that Casablancas was the one the world was waiting for.

Laden in synths and Casio beats, this 8 track LP is too hit and miss to live up to such anticipation. ‘Out of the Blue’ is for all intents and purposes a Strokes song, however, it’s one that wouldn’t make the album but might wrangle onto a Japanese import. Jaggly and apathetically impassioned (should such a thing exist) ‘Out of the Blue’ confirms Casablancas has talent, he just chooses not to fully apply himself.

‘11th Dimension’ is genuinely reflective of what could have been, lyrically it displays a coming of age for Casablancas who laments his homeland’s insular attitude over the past ten years but decries yearning (if he has got to be stronger than your fear’ musically, it’s a tune and you should listen to it and love it.

4 Chords of the Apocalypse’ gives credence to those who argue Casablancas may be inclined to rip off and who rapidly move out of their teens. Lazy lyrics aside this album is enjoyable but lacks the character we saw in previous releases, the only memorable track being the lead single ‘If you want me. ‘Other tracks ‘Put Me Back Together’ ‘Let It All Hang Out’ ‘Tripping Down the Freeway’ and ‘In the Mall’ are decent but not enough to warrant the inclusion of the song

Raditude - Weezer
DGC/Interscope
By Katie Hennessy

Five albums later, yankee cool group Weezer offer up Raditude. This ten track offering stays on form with their accessible punk rock sound, that’s pleased many for so long.

Using the tried and tested formula of singing about hot girls and partying can grow tiresome over years and has a tendency to lose their devoted listenership

3 Words - Cheryl Cole
DGC/Interscope
By David Phelan

Cheryl Cole; media-whore, footballer’s wife, purveyor of all things Jedward and in her spare time a pop singer. Breaking from the shackles of her day job as the second best looking member of Girls Aloud (minus Nicola - being the first), Mrs.Ashley has recorded her debut solo effort: 3 Words.

With influential and talented producers like Sylence, Tako Cruz and Will.I Am featured on the record, one would assume that Cole couldn’t help but make a classic dance-floor thumper. Starting with title track ‘3 Words’, Cole launches herself in the same ilk as that of La Roux or Little Boots, seductive, understated and electronic.

Interestingly ‘3 Words’ is not an obvious single but it does suggest a willingness to experiment and a flying a nebula to the merits of trance, it’s enough to make you want to then more. Just when you thought Cheryl has surprised us all and gone ‘Orbital. ‘Parachute’ comes along; definitely single, definite number one, not dissimilar to Rihanna’s neck of the woods, great beat, massive chorus and a production gem Barry Scott would shout about.

Can’t Stop Partyin’ featuring rapping du jour Lil Wayne.

It’s as if we were entirely borrowed from another artist and even with Jermaine Dupri on production, it’s still not convincing. The same can be said for most of this album where it seems they are simply trying to be something they’re not.

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Cushioned between two relatively standard and dull tunes in ‘Heaven’ and ‘Rain on Me’ (probable single also but just too commercial), the song ‘Fight For This Love’, no-one needs to tell you how good this is, it went in at number one when orange 14 year olds across the land got even a whiff of the cellophane wrapping.

The album serves to disappoint hereafter, with what can only be described as a mix of standard Whitney-esque numbers that Fergie would have cocked her nose at (it’s what happens when you work with Will.I Am). The exception is the inclusion of summer smash- ‘Heartbreaker’, which is thrown in only as a last minute panic. It’s an effort in all; four unreal tracks, a couple of stonkers and the rest is filler.
Chomsky
On why the world is falling apart

By Jonathan Adams

The renowned Professor of Linguistics is known for his work on the use of language, his critique of American foreign policies, and his Anarchist politics.

He spoke about how the global recession is being handled in the media. He says: “Partially accurately...[they're] making out like the banks are bandits...[but] it doesn't go beyond...to explain why.”

The problem with this, he says, is that only right-wing “lunatics” are giving people answers to the recession.

Prof. Chomsky gives a typical ‘answer’ that’s found in the media: “They say it’s the rich liberals who own the banks...[and they] are giving everything away to illegal (immigrants) and they don’t care about the people.”

He says: “It’s a little like [pre-] Nazi Germany, where the Nazis were appealing to the same grievances, and they were giving answers. Crazy answers, but there was no-one giving good answers.”

Prof. Chomsky outlined his fears that this could lead to a “very dangerous right-wing backlash”. This could potentially see groups like the British National Party (BNP) and other Fascist parties begin to gain support in Europe and the US.

‘The crash’ as he sees it, is due to Capitalism itself, and particularly, the neo-Liberal policies of the last thirty years.

As he sees it, though, there is hope — in the labour movement. Through the unions, and fighting back against attacks on working people stagnating, we’ve financialised the economy and destroyed productive [industry], [and all] because it enriches rich people.”

He says: “If the working class accepts, the we’re ‘one-big family’ line (from business and Government), they are in trouble, that’s the reality of ongoing class war.”

Prof. Chomsky talks about the impossibility of mainstream politicians admitting that Capitalism is the cause of what he calls a “surreal crisis”, and this is why the political right is growing.

It’s a little like Nazi Germany, where the
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economic texts...so-called stakeholders and [the] workforce [can] take over from a corporation and run it in their interests, it's pretty straightforward."

He gives an example: "In the US, industrial plants are being shut down, [while] the Obama administration has got officials off in Spain and France using [taxpayer] money to purchase high speed rail technology," this he stresses, is not necessary.

The technology could be produced in US plants except, like so many other industries they currently owe huge amounts to the banks. He says: "If the communities and the workforce had reached the right level of consciousness, they would just take over the plant, reconstruct it, and start producing high-speed rail transport."

Prof. Chomsky spoke about the Waterford Crystal protest, were workers facing redundancy decided to stage a protest at the factory by sitting-in.

He says, this type of action is "just under the surface of protests... as soon as workers start sitting-in that's when legislation [gets] passed... because a step beyond a sit-in, is why don't we take it over?"

Similar types of actions have been taken by workers at the Thomas Cook travel agents opposite Trinity College, and at the Visteon Ford car factory in Belfast. Over 100 Gardai brought an end to the sit-in at Thomas Cook — perhaps supporting Prof. Chomsky's claim as to what is at stake.

He says: "If there's enough understanding... you can take the next step... and that would be a constructive way out of this recession. Take [workplaces] over. I don't think it's that far from [working peoples] awareness... I think it's kind of reasonable."

He concludes: "I think [taking over] is just below the surface. [We just have to] light that spark."

Undoubtedly, the confines of news media pages are not sufficient for revealing Chomsky's intellect the space it deserves. While his views may seem simplistic at first, within that simplicity lies the genius of his thought. When faced with a crisis, why look to where we always look to explain things, the officials, the bosses, the Parties, the economists, the Government? They've proven that they couldn't predict the crash, can't stop it, and don't care enough about what it does to the people most affected by it. Take over.


Recession Chic

By Deirdre McGing

To be a recessionista is to be one of two things: A person who embraces being affected by the credit crunch because it's the 'in' thing to do, or a genuine penniless pauper, who manages to remain fiercely stylish whilst maintaining a budget.

Cheap chic is a hot economic trend for 2009. It seems that everyone from River Island to A Wear has slashed their prices in an effort to maintain some level of loyalty among their customers.

Surprising as it may seem, Dunnes Stores seems to be the hottest ticket in town for festive looks this winter.

What was once renowned for its loyal over-40s fan base is now a haven for a staggering number of young customers eager to pick up some major bargains.

A significant number of festive frocks have recently been released which include everything from fab-u-less fringe shift dresses to glittering sequined looks. Dresses start from €20, practically a steal when you put them in perspective to other leading high street stores.

The even more economic option would be the notorious Penneys. The store has taken on a sort of hierarchy of style in these recessionary times.

Yes, they stock basically everything under the sun, no; the quality isn't great and will probably fall apart after the first wash. But a mere €25 for a military-style embellished jacket is little difficult to resist.

Penneys have also taken to the strong-shoulder trend as seen in Vivienne Westwood and Balmain collections for Autumn/Winter 2009 and currently stock several tea dresses with stark shoulder features.

Don't forget to check out the shoe section for fierce Jimmy Choo-esque reptile platforms for €21. These babies are guaranteed to scream sex appeal and add loads of height for all you petite girlys.

In terms of Dublin's low-key fashion scene, there isn't much to the untrained eye. But once you know where to go there is a lot more to offer than you would have originally anticipated.

Dublin's greatest fashion secret has undoubtedly got to be the Secret Boutique at no.6 Exchequer St. This tiny venue only opens for a few days at a time, but once it is open, it transforms into fashion Mecca.

Top designer pieces such as those by Paul Sweeney are sold at a fraction of the price. Be warned ladies; once you hear about a sale opening up, you keep it to yourselves. The items in sales such as this one sell out like hot cupcakes on a snowy day.

Keep yourself up to date by adding the Secret Boutique to your Facebook so that you're constantly in the know.

Other shops worthy of your custom are Oxfam Vintage on Georges Street, Wildchild in the Georges Street Arcade, and Harlequin, located off Drury St. These spots make kitschy thrill amazingly cool and shatter the idea of mouldy outdated looks expected from the thrift world.

The beauty of Bacon

By Todd Ryan

The Dublin City Gallery is showcasing a new exhibition of unseen works from one of the twentieth century's most prolific artists; Francis Bacon. The legendary figurative painter has had a bursting display at the Hugh Lane Gallery since 2001 and this new exhibition will no doubt please Bacon fans.

Francis Bacon: A Terrible Beauty celebrates the centenary of Francis Bacon's birth in 63 Lower Baggot Street, Dublin.

The exhibition focuses on the unseen items from Bacon's studio and comprises paintings, drawings, photographs, unfinished works and slashed canvases, an invaluable sight for any fans of the famous artist. The new works are laid out clearly and spread out in bright and airy exhibition rooms.

Bacon's work has been showcased in major exhibitions in cities such as London, Paris, New York, Dublin and Los Angeles throughout his career. This is similar to Bacon's history as an artist. Moving from London to Berlin in the late 1920's Bacon opened his mind to the world of artistry.

It wasn't until he moved to Paris that Bacon discovered his real love of art after seeing a Picasso exhibition in the city. After returning to London, Bacon became a furniture designer for a short time before returning to his first love; painting. His first high profile painting was the Crucifixion 1933 but in the 1940's his career took off.

The influential artist is most known for the surrealism in his work and the nightmarish and violent imagery shown in his paintings. This is especially seen in "Study for the Head of a Screaming Pope" which was influenced by the 1925 film 'The Battleship Potemkin'. The scene of the blood soaked nurse in the film was a major influence of the painter throughout his career.

The slashed canvases profiled in the new exhibition, show Bacon's talent in its raw form. The process of destroying work is not unusual but common to Bacon who was noted as quite a perfectionist. The works were found in Bacon's home after his death and are now being displayed in the new exhibition.

The rarity of the Terrible Beauty exhibition gives the display an atmosphere unlike any I have experienced before. This is noted as one of the major European cultural events of the year and will be available to view until March 2010 when the exhibition will move to Compton Verney, Warwickshire, England.

Dublin City Gallery the Hugh Lane is situated on Charlemont House, Parnell Square North, Dublin 1. Admission is free (good news to us students!) and a cafe and bookshop are open during gallery hours. Definitely worth a look, even if you're not a huge Bacon fan this really is a once in a lifetime opportunity.
Across
1. Look up surface disturbance (10)
2. 1759 (10)
3. Nach bhfuil an cathair seo tábhachtaí? Tá nó Níl (6)
4. Carnival city (3)
5. Head of education (6)
6. Our guy Tommy (7)
7. Pandemic pokies (8)
8. The Speaker (9)
9. Chilly music in the park (8)
10. Book 'er for a signing (8)
11. Borderline theatrics (6)
12. Electric (7)
13. Windy ham (5)
14. Growing problems (3)
15. Mana from government (4)
16. Ranked 16,000 (5)

Down
1. Which actor played the part of Tom Hagen in The Godfather?
2. What is the capital city of El Salvador?
3. How many of The Two Ronnies are still alive?
4. Which music God had a hit with the song True Colours?
5. In which county is the urban metropolis of Newtوضوحة?
6. Name the technical device which was invented by Dr. Emmett Brown and makes time travel possible?
7. Who wrote and directed the comedy classic Planes, Trains, and Automobiles?
8. What was the name of Ross's pet monkey in Friends?
9. Boxing legend Roberto Duran is from which country?
10. Talented Oscar-winning pervert Roman Polanski is a dual citizen of France and which other country?
11. Who was allegedly the second man to walk on the moon during the hoax "Apollo 11 NASA space mission" of 1969?
12. How many Premier League titles have Liverpool "legends" Steven Gerrard and Jamie Carragher won between them?
13. How many Premier League titles has Ryan Giggs won for Manchester United?
14. Norman Cook aka Fatboy Slim was a member of which popular British band during the 1980s?
15. Which Irish road was immortalised in song by The Saw Doctors?
16. Which Australian rugby union player was nicknamed "Nobody" by virtue of the fact that he was perfect?
17. Which author wrote The Bonfire of the Vanities?
18. According to Ireland "footballer" Stephen Hunt, Eamon Dunphy bears a striking resemblance to which rodent?
19. Which popular American quiz show featured in the movie White Men Can't

Email your answers to: newssozed@gmail.com
(Subject line Quiz Answers)
Giggidy giggidy

Coors Light Peak Free Outdoor Gigs, Dublin Docklands, 7th November 2009

By Katie Hennessy

The last event of the Coors Light Peak free outdoor gigs took place in Dublin's docklands on Saturday, November 7th, after a number of weeks travelling around the country hitting Limerick, Galway, Cork and Waterford.

The music event that enlisted the likes of Flight Like Apees, The Charlatans and Jape turned ports and shipyards across the country into self contained mini festivals.

With Coors Light on tap, an impressive stage set-up and live streaming of the gig projected onto stacked containers, Codes, R.S.A.G and New Young Pony Club played to an enthusiastic albeit frozen crowd.

With temperatures sticking around the one degree mark, acts had their work cut out for them to keep the crowd moving but starting with Codes, followed by the rhythm-heavy R.S.A.G, slowly those freezing hands came out of various pockets to clap along.

However it was the DJ duo of Drag Queen Bingo, playing in the intermission before NYPC on the smaller stage, who can be accredited with getting the party started. Joined onstage by four drummers from the Extreme Rhythm group, they hammered out incredible beats to whatever the DJs decided to lash out. Playing for the crowd, they had everyone jumping.

NYPC took their place on the main stage soon after, lead singer Tahita Bulmer knowing full well she would have to work hard to keep up spirits and did her best wrapped in her quilted coat, jumping around the stage.

Had the band followed suit and played to their audience this could have been an excellent gig. Playing exactly as they should have was not enough on this November evening, where they reamed out their hits Ice-Cream, The Get-Go and finally ended on the Bomb.

Playing well live is not the same as being a good live act and while they left the crowd feeling mildly pleased, it was clearly not enough for them to forget the frostbite in their toes.

Passion Pit
The Academy
2nd November 2009

By Alana McMahon

Passion Pit began 2009 in a whirl of hype and expectation following their massive success with debut EP Chunk of Change. However, the May release of album Manners didn't attract the acclaim expected and their early live shows didn't make the impact that was hoped for.

What Michael Angelakos and company have done is tour and tour, and then tour a little more, gathering a loyal fan base and polishing their performances. This is the most evident thing about their show in The Academy; they are no longer the amateur quintet from Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Their set list has been excellently planned to keep the audience leaping and dancing through the whole show with opening song "Make Light" setting the tone for the rest of the evening. Infectious vocal lines found in songs like "Little Secrets" keeping the audience engaged.

In a frenzy of synth that would make even James Ford blush, they ease through crowd pleasers such as "Eyes Like Candles" and "I've Got Your Number". However, it's debut single "Sleepyhead" that is the highlight of the show.

Nonetheless, there is something lacking about Passion Pit live. It cannot be denied that they're professional and polished but at times it's so rehearsed that it's boring. Angelakos' interaction with the audience is kept to a minimum and even encore "The Reeling" is somewhat of an anti-climax.

For a band with such promise, it is a shame that their shows lack the passion of their releases.

Gig Soc Showcase
Whelans
4th November 2009

By John Jereza

On Wednesday, November 4th we had a gig in the Upstairs Venue in Whelans. It was our DIT bands showcase titled Homegrown Vol. 1. It had an impressive turnout and we've had very positive feedback from the outcome of the event. The acts in the line up were Oisin O'Neill (acoustic), The Midnight Special, Kevin on a Bike and Vietnam. I've attached pictures of the night though I'm not sure if they're good enough in quality to be used for the paper, but I'm afraid due to constraints these were the best we could manage.

As for upcoming activities firstly we will be having a meet and greet session tomorrow, Monday 16th November at 5pm with Rodrigo y Gabriella in the Olympia Theatre in conjunction with Guitar Soc in Bolton Street. Members from both societies will be meeting with the renowned Spanish duo before their show begins tomorrow night in the Olympia.

We also have planned a night in conjunction with GameSoc and DJ Soc where we will be setting up game consoles and music equipment, while also having the rhythm games Guitar Hero, Rock Band, and the recently released DJ Hero up and running for all to play. As well as that we hold jam sessions with open mic nights incorporated into them every week, the next of which will be this Thursday and every other thereof at 6pm in the Black Box, unless otherwise stated.

Another upcoming event we have is the DIT X-mas Factor, a singer-songwriter/musician contest which will be held on the stage in Bolton Street in early December. It will also be in association with Guitar Soc, however planning is still in the early stages and we don't have too many details on it just yet.

Our final planned event for semester 1 will be the second installment of our bands showcase, Homegrown Vol. II, on the 14th of December. It will once again be in Whelans Upstairs, with the lineup being Cathal Farrell (acoustic), Rusty Pariah and Local Strangers. Admission will be 5 euro at the door, doors at 8pm.
Airborne Toxic Event, Olympia Theatre, 11th November 2009

By Katie Hennessy

When a band's first song could be mistaken for their last, you know it's going to be good. With all the passion of an en-core The Airborne Toxic Event opened the show, teaching us a few of the things they've learned about live shows in their two year tour, promoting their debut self-titled album.

Hitting Dublin stages for the fifth time, set-up complete with two mini screens, a raised drum platform and steps to accommodate those stage dives, this was never going to be an ordinary show.

With a short intro, followed by Does This Mean Your Moving On, they set the standard very high. Switching instruments every so often; between keys, guitars, basses and double basses, the one thing that couldn't be ignored is the sheer fluency with music that this band shows as a collective.

Toxic Event did seem to find it hard to make an impact on the Irish audience in the first half of the show, barely coaxing a response and trying to ignore the fact that half the crowd seemed to be there for that ‘radio edit’ Sometime Before Midnight.

Nonetheless the atmosphere sprang from one end of the spectrum to the other in the second half when the crowd finally got their pleaser, not as a show-closer as one might expect but, near enough to the end that the band had a few tracks left in them to really display their skills in sweetening the sour of the Irish audience.

Jazz degrees and the ability to play a guitar with a violin bow aside, it can be said from seeing it first-hand that this is their greatest achievement to date.

Toy Story 3D

By Craig Reynolds

In the build-up to the release of Toy Story 3, the original children's classic Toy Story has been re-released in the exciting 3D format. The delightful movie toys with childlike curiosity and considers a child's most important question: what happens when you leave toys alone in a room?

According to the film, they come to life! The film centres on a gang of convivial playthings led by the charismatic Woody, a pull-string cowboy who just so happens to be Andy's favourite toy. On Andy's birthday he receives the latest must have action figure: a spaceman named Buzz Lightyear. Buzz soon becomes the apple of Andy's eye leaving Woody jealous of his new space comrade.

After a turn of events Woody and Buzz are left stranded in the 'outside world' and must form an alliance in order to survive. The face many obstacles on their quest to return home including Andy's malicious neighbour Sid who loves nothing more than melting toys and near destruction as they are rocketed into the air.

The 3D revamp adds an intriguing new dimension to an already amazing film. Constantly hailed as Pixar's best work, Toy Story highlights the true power of animated movies and shows that without a doubt animated films have the same power to evoke an emotional response the viewer, both old and young, as their live action counterparts.

If anything the 3D element makes the film seem even funnier and more engaging than before and will have children and adults alike finding themselves once again completely drawn into the cartoon masterpiece.

Jennifer's Body

By Patrick Thompson

New from the pen of Oscar winning Juno scribe Diablo Cody and director Karyn Kasamu (Girlfight, Aeon Flux) comes Jennifer's Body. The movie is a horror flick about Needy, a slightly Geeky teenage girl and her friend Jennifer (played by Transformers star and tabloid regular Megan Fox).

An indie band desperate for success sacrifice Jennifer to the devil thinking she's a virgin but of course being Megan Fox this is not the case. Jennifer is possessed by a demon and begins consuming the boys of the small town from the quarterback to the hilarious emo kid.

The film is surprisingly dark with some quite bleak moments and copious amounts of gore. No matter how bloody the film doesn't really work as a horror. Not particularly scary and lacking originality the film cannot compete within the horror genre but can fit comfortably into the witty comedy bracket.

The dialogue is fantastic and hilarious. Those alienated by Juno's self consciously hip lingo can relax as the wit is more approachable in Jennifer's Body. The acting on the whole is of a high standard with the much touted Megan Fox playing support to Amanda Seyfried's Needy. The standout performance however is JK Simmons who plays a hilariously out of touch teacher.

The film is surprisingly emotional; it's core story showing two childhood friends and the sad demise of their friendship. Sadly boys, there's no nudity though Fox is objectified in much the same way as Michael Bay might put her astride a motorbike, and it all gets a little kinkily. Overall this is a good enjoyable film but nothing ground breaking.
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Hooked on Facebook

By Deirdre McGing

Facebook, a place where lonely and socially incompetent losers can pretend they have a life, but at what price?

Facebook has become an indispensable way to become 'friends' with the people you despised in school, have a virtual farm, inform the world about something dim-witted that's on your mind and they even have something called the 'news feed' where you learn about dumb shit that no one really cares about, effectively it is the world's best means of stalking.

What began as a creepy way to rendezvous with the world at large has now spiralled into a ridiculous obsession for many users and may have you logging on up to ten times a day. You may seem to be glued to your monitor for hours at a time, and the only website that you're arising around on is Facebook.

Comical as this may appear, a phenomenon known as 'Facebook Addiction Disorder' or 'FAD' is very real in today's society. Although it is not an official medical diagnosis, therapists claim they are witnessing an increased number of users who've crossed the line from social networking to social dysfunction.

Experts also argue that users seem to depart the real world for a significant time period of their everyday lives to spend time in the 'Facebook world', as it is referred to. This glorious virtual place is a happy land; in short, it is a place where people's everyday problems seem to melt away.

However, it appears that the vast majority of its 200 million users have not reached the point of no return just yet. Facebook only becomes problematic when users ignore family and work obligations because they find the Facebook world a more enjoyable place to spend time than the real world.

There is a definite problem with Facebook. When you think about it, it's not real. To be a member of Facebook is to place oneself in a fabricated world. Nothing ever really goes wrong. The only things that are posted on your wall are the positive or humorous things that happen to you, and of course the things that no one really gives a shit about.

It is especially alluring when life isn't going so well for you, as is the case with many individuals during a tough economic climate. The only time on Facebook that you may be 'strapped for cash' is on Farmville, and the worst that can happen is that you lose the ability to buy more virtual cows.

For those of you who are not socially inept, Farmville and other random applications in general have been known for their 'addictive' qualities on Facebook.

Paul (not his real name) is one of many who has admitted he is addicted to Facebook and lays sole blame on its applications:

"I only signed up to Facebook because it was a good way to stay in touch with people, but then I started playing with the little application games and got hooked". He adds that his favourite application of all is the notorious Farmville, stating "I feel like a real farmer now".

Facebook addicts have been known to fight over who has the finest farm of them all. How someone can find such a chore like farming so entertaining is laughable. Do not be alarmed if your non-virtual friends become engaged in this banter. Your friends are not real farmers!

Don't fool yourselves people. Facebook will not provide compensation when you fail your degree, nor will complaining or creating groups actually bring about a change in the world.

Should your dreams start to feature people writing on your wall or you suddenly find yourself saying things like 'I will tag you in this photo' when you are out having a life, chances are you have become addicted.

Be cautious, some think they are immune to the effects of Facebook, until they try it and by then it's too late. Protect Yourselves!

This article has been written by a Facebook addict. As they say, the first step to recovery is admitting you have a problem.

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Students a no-show at mass protest

By Glenn Fitzpatrick

The first Friday of the month saw tens of thousands take to the streets of Ireland in protest of the proposed cuts in the upcoming budget. The day overall was a huge success as people still turned out in their droves, however, there was a missing dimension to the crowd.

Evidently people were upset about many things; the mismanagement of the economy during the Celtic Tiger, the lack of regulation of the banks and developers, the fact that none of the guilty have been brought to court and the billions of taxpayer's money which will be used into the by government to save the banks through NAMA. The list goes on.

I attended the march because I believe it affects me, my family, my community and my college. It is hard to stomach the thought of all of the lost opportunities all of us could have had in the future. I was extremely disappointed with the student turnout on the day, given the consequences that I have mentioned above.

I cannot understand why DIT/SU did not march to voice their protests and to seek to ensure fair play for all. We are all registered to the text service they use and it would have taken seconds to send out a mass SMS encouraging student participation in the demonstration.

Need I remind everyone of the loss of facilities and increased capititation fees? Or has DIT been submerged by a thick cloud of apathy? Where was the famous radicalism of the student movement in 2009?
Cyclists vs Pedestrians the war wages on

By Gillian Middleton

Cycling masses of Dublin, I have a bone to pick with you. I agree that it’s the cheap, healthy and green way of getting around. The benefits are obvious in that there’s no need for petrol. There are none of those nasty exhaust fumes and parking is free. It’s also a great way to lose weight, you dashing rogues you.

With the Dublin Bike Scheme in full swing there are more of you than ever to be seen pedal-pushing around the city centre. You all have even developed your own lingo, so if you’re not “two-wheeling” then your “chain” probably needs “oil” or you will “handlebar it” all over the place! Now, admittedly, I made that last part up but this could well be the not too distant future, and you can “saddle” that all the way to the bank.

One couldn’t but have the utmost respect for anyone who has the chutzpah to take to the roads of Dublin, sitting atop a tiny metal frame with no protection but a helmet and the reflexes of a cat. However, the problem with cycling arises with the reckless and downright bad-mannered behaviour of some cyclists that endangers both pedestrians and themselves.

There are no winners in the battle between cyclists and pedestrians, only injuries.

Whilst it’s great to see so many moving towards greener forms of transport, it’s not quite so endearing when a cyclist tears across a pedestrian crossing narrowly missing (if they’re lucky) those innocently obeying the law of the green man. The red light means stop. Many of you don’t seem to have grasped this just yet.

The Road Safety Authority’s rules of the road state it thus: “you [yes, you] must obey the rules applying at traffic lights, pedestrian crossings, pelican crossings and zebra crossings.” The presence of a saddle under your backside does not make you some breed of vehicle-human hybrid to which the rules of the road are no longer applicable.

This isn’t performance art. There is no room for improvisation. If the light is green for pedestrians then you must stop. The other issue that I have is with regard to footpaths: these are our turf so either walk on them with your bike or stay off them altogether.

Now, Gillian, you say, we don’t have it all that easy either. The inadequacy of cycle lanes in Dublin and careless motorists make approaching the city centre a difficult manoeuvre at the best of times. Many of you do, in fact, seem to be locked in a perpetual state of fight-or-flight as a result.

Believe me, I feel for the difficulties that you face. However, that doesn’t negate your responsibility to abide by the rules in order to protect pedestrians. We are a vulnerable people, cyclists, treat us gently. There are no winners in the battle between our groups, only injuries.
Chernobyl—a terrible beauty born

Looking for a different kind of weekend getaway? What about Chernobyl? Ukrainian tour operators are offering guided day trips to the site devastated by a nuclear accident in the mid-80s. Susan Ryan took a look.

Chernobyl. The name conveys disaster, dread, death. If you’re visiting Ukraine, and are curious enough about Chernobyl to quell any overbearing anxieties about radiation exposure, it is now possible to get a guided tour of the area and see the damaged reactor and surrounding area for yourself. Tours can be organized for pairs or for groups traveling from Kiev, although the availability of tours for pairs is much less and the price much much more.

Our group of 14 assembled at maydan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) in Kiev’s city centre on a sunny September morning. The rules are simple: bring a passport, pay up front and prepare to sign the waiver form protecting the organisers from litigation should you later develop any kind of radiation-related illness.

An English-language TV documentary played on the bus outlining the accident and the dramatic, tragic aftermath. On 26 April 1986, an accident at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in then-Soviet Ukraine resulted in the meltdown of Reactor 4. As part of the ensuing clean up and containment operation, an exclusion zone was set up in the perimeter of the accident zone. Today, there are two exclusion zone checkpoints: one 30km from the plant, and a second at 10km. Initially evacuated, the area within between the two perimeters has been deemed safe for resettlement, and it is in this in-between region that the town of Chernobyl lies.

The bus stopped at the first perimeter where solemn guards unenthusiastically checked all passports. At this point our guide began what would become his mantra of warnings: ‘don’t step on the moss’, and ‘keep shaking your feet so you don’t get nuclear dust’. The latter resulted in a day-long mania of foot stamping by all participants. We drove to the visitor’s centre in Chernobyl where our guide showed us maps depicting the fall-out from the accident and the uninhabited areas. He warned the group to look out for any wayward wolves, one of whom had attacked some plant workers a few weeks ago. You couldn’t help thinking those poor souls were blatantly the unluckiest on the planet, it wasn’t enough that they worked at the site of the worst nuclear accident in history.

Due to the absence of humans in the area for some 20 years, nature has thrived. Wolves and bears now feature, and a pack of wild horses introduced in recent years has flourished. We were taken to a lake beside the nuclear plant and encouraged to feed bread to a school of enormous catfish. Not the result of radiation, the guide assured us, but because no one has fished in these waters since the accident. The tour guide also mentioned, incidentally, he would soon commence a new season of ecological tours of Chernobyl. This is presumably tailored for the more environmentally-conscious nuclear tourist.

After being told we couldn’t photograph security fences, plant employees or the other (now disused but manned for safety reasons) power plant reactors, the guide brought us to Reactor 4, site of the 1986 disaster. The once-exposed reactor had been hastily cooled with sand, cement and lead, then built over with what appears to be a giant cement barn. The reactor’s chimney stands likewise encased in cement, towering conspicuously over the construction.

One eager tourist pointed to some scaffolding welded to the western side of the plant, the side facing our vantage point, and asked if this was the foundation for the planned new sarcophagus for the reactor. The guide pointed to some enormous cement blocks a few hundred yards away as the foundations of the new covering, then explained that the scaffolding had been added in recent years when the wall began to bend. The current rust-streaked cement sarcophagus will be covered over by a new containment structure before 2012, which will in turn have to be replaced in approximately 100 years.

The tour then moved to the city of Pripyat, former home to the plant employees and their families. Pripyat was evacuated the day after the disaster and nature has done its best to reclaim the dozens of Soviet-style cement building blocks that were formerly a hotel, a sports centre, a school, a cultural centre, apartments. Our guide held a radiation-measuring dosimeter to certain objects to point out the levels of absorption, and showed us just how toxic the moss really is.

It’s hard to believe that people left Pripyat so relatively recently, given the level of damage and forestation. Furnishings have been removed, possibly stolen by the vandals who took much of the city’s metal. Every step taken in the buildings of Pripyat crunches on the shattered glass and books lie strewn across hallways and corridors. A Ferris wheel and bumper cars lie abandoned and unused in an outdoor carnival planned to open the week after the accident at the plant, and trees have rooted along the many balconies of former residences. Riving back to the visitor’s centre, the bus passed the area referred to as the ‘red forest’ because the trees died and turned red after contact with the exceptionally high levels of radiation. The trees were subsequently cut down and burned, but the area remains highly contaminated. Our guide held the dosimeter out the window as we drove past the numbers sped right off the chart.

The tour ended with each member of the group being checked for any signs of radioactive contamination, a nerve-racking moment, followed by a late lunch served beside the nuclear plant and encouraged to feed some enormous catfish. Not the result of radiation, he assured us, but because no one has fished in these waters. The tour ended with each member of the group being checked for any signs of radioactive contamination, a nerve-racking moment, followed by a late lunch served beside the nuclear plant and encouraged to feed some enormous catfish. Not the result of radiation, he assured us, but because no one has fished in these waters. The tour ended with each member of the group being checked for any signs of radioactive contamination, a nerve-racking moment, followed by a late lunch served beside the nuclear plant and encouraged to feed some enormous catfish. Not the result of radiation, he assured us, but because no one has fished in these waters. The tour ended with each member of the group being checked for any signs of radioactive contamination, a nerve-racking moment, followed by a late lunch served beside the nuclear plant and encouraged to feed some enormous catfish. Not the result of radiation, he assured us, but because no one has fished in these waters. The tour ended with each member of the group being checked for any signs of radioactive contamination, a nerve-racking moment, followed by a late lunch served beside the nuclear plant and encouraged to feed some enormous catfish. Not the result of radiation, he assured us, but because no one has fished in these waters. The tour ended with each member of the group being checked for any signs of radioactive contamination, a nerve-racking moment, followed by a late lunch served beside the nuclear plant and encouraged to feed some enormous catfish. Not the result of radiation, he assured us, but because no one has fished in these waters. The tour ended with each member of the group being checked for any signs of radioactive contamination, a nerve-racking moment, followed by a late lunch served beside the nuclear plant and encouraged to feed some enormous catfish. Not the result of radiation, he assured us, but because no one has fished in these waters. The tour ended with each member of the group being checked for any signs of radioactive contamination, a nerve-racking moment, followed by a late lunch served beside the nuclear plant and encouraged to feed some enormous catfish. Not the result of radiation, he assured us, but because no one has fished in these waters. The tour ended with each member of the group being checked for any signs of radioactive contamination, a nerve-racking moment, followed by a late lunch served beside the nuclear plant and encouraged to feed some enormous catfish. Not the result of radiation, he assured us, but because no one has fished in these waters. The tour ended with each member of the group being checked for any signs of radioactive contamination, a nerve-racking moment, followed by a late lunch served beside the nuclear plant and encouraged to feed some enormous catfish. Not the result of radiation, he assured us, but because no one has fished in these waters.
Blackrock to Bangkok

By Andrew Purfield

For many students the duration of the academic year is not spent essay writing or preparing for exams - it is spent planning the approaching summer. From saving for expensive flights to organizing accommodation it can be as stressful as many of our college responsibilities but with three months off a year there is no end to the opportunity one can pursue.

America is an ever popular choice with those who wish to undertake J1s and work and play in equal measure. The strict over 21s drinking laws can hinder havoc-making for those in the 18-21 age bracket though and the shockingly low minimum wage in America can prove a problem for young workers hoping to fund their fun and frolics all summer.

Europe is clearly the easiest choice as there are no visa hassles and home is just a short plane ride away. This can dilute the adventurous aspect of a students’ first long stretch away from the nest. The safety and familiarity of Europe seems to be the reason why many shy away on the search for something more.

Increasingly this search leads hordes of students to exotic Asia, more specifically Thailand. Young people who tire of home and its western aspects go to Thailand in search of a fresh experience and a culture shock. Stepping off the plane into the humid, bustling and disturbing Bangkok, a culture shock is indeed what they get.

Most young students and ‘back packers’ stay on the Khao San Road which is a famous traveller destination. It is busy and noisy and filled with shopping stalls, hostels and massage parlours. Many are disturbed by the seedy nature of certain places in Bangkok, where one can see live sex shows; sadly Thai prostitutes seem to be everywhere.

Once you arrive in Bangkok the options are varied. Many chose to go directly to the islands and some travel to Chang Mai for jungle treks. These involve staying in villages in the depth of the Thai jungle, fantastic views and elephant riding.

There are a great many dangers even if you do chose to merely stay on the main island trail. Most of the islands, especially the smaller ones have virtually no police force and the few that are present are easily corruptible.

If you have a problem, particularly if it involves locals the police are usually reluctant to help you. Many guys involved in bar fights or found with drugs can feel the wrath of the unmonitored police force. If you find yourself in a cell, the best bet is most definitely to try to bribe local police - this effort usually is successful.

The larger islands such as Phuket or Koh Samui hold many of the same traits as Bangkok. They have wild night life, pollution, crime and interestingly an increasing number of transsexuals or ‘ladyboys’ who prowl the streets usually in search of Western men. Young people go to these islands stopping over on the way to more desirable places or for the nightlife and buzzing atmosphere. There is also a wide variety of shopping to be enjoyed, mostly street markets where locals try to make a living haggling with tourists.

Many of the smaller islands provide young people with the escape they are searching for. Koh Tao is among the best diving sites in the world and at around €300, it is the cheapest place to become qualified as a diving instructor. Beginners also can learn to dive and avail of the amazing rates.

Another quiet island which young people are drawn to is Koh Phi Phi, where the legendary backpacker movie ‘The Beach’ was shot. There are fire shows, where you can jump through hoops of fire and skip with the rope ablaze, and incredible beaches (as long as you’re willing to endure a bit of a trek to get there). However Maya Bay where ‘The Beach’ was shot is a disappointment and is largely commercialised now.

An island which every young person travelling Thailand will visit is Koh Phangan. This is where the Full Moon Party takes place every month. Thousands flock to Had Rin beach for the night where music plays through the dawn into the mid morning. People paint themselves head to toe in luminous UV paint and drink buckets, literally beach-buckets, of alcohol into the wee hours.

This event is famous throughout the travelling world as being one of the wildest parties on the planet. The night has its dangers and the clinics and makeshift hospitals are brimming by nights end with those who fell afoul of drunken falls, alcohol poisoning, or drug over-dose.

On the smaller islands there is very limited health care available to tourists. The advice to travellers would be to prevent illnesses and accidents by using insect-repellent and treating all injuries appropriately before infection sets in. Another crucial piece of advice I would offer is to try to eat in clean places, food poisoning doesn’t sound like too dire a consequence, but trust me after eating a dodgy thai curry from a street vendor, you’ll find yourself curled up in the foetal position begging for death.

Disease and muggings are not the only worry in this other-worldly place, there is also a danger of fraud in Thailand - there are many cases where bank or credit card details have been stolen or obtained illegally which consequents in the unsuspecting bank account being emptied (there were three of these incidents on my trip). These cases are very difficult to trace and prove therefore it is difficult to get the stolen money back through insurance.

Although the dangers and negatives of Thailand are apparent, young people will continue to flock there summer after summer. This is down to Thailand’s reputation for wilderness and adventure. This reputation certainly exceeds itself and while young people strive for a place that will broaden their horizons and make a difference in their lives they will continue to go there in search for more.
By Paul Mc Nulty

By coming out as gay in his new book, Cork hurler Donal Og Cusack has become one of the few openly homosexual athletes in the sporting world today.

In recent years a few athletes have decided to come out, but these have usually been from individual events such as tennis or diving. Only a small handful of gay athletes in men's team sports have ever come out of the closet and only then after their retirement.

"I always would have felt a duty that, before I finished my playing career, I would speak about it," Cusack said. "Because I knew it would have a bigger impact while I was still playing and potentially help guys who aremaybe not able to deal with the situation."

Tom Humphries, who helped Cusack write the book said "he has challenged that boorish machismo that still underpins a lot of Irish society and a lot of GAA life. And he has challenged those of us who by our silence are accomplices in that culture. From now on we have to judge ourselves, not Donal Og Cusack."

Many examples of the machismo that Humphries speaks about were exhibited in the aftermath of ex-NBA star John Amaechi's coming out. Amaechi revealed his sexuality after an eight year career, including stints with the Orlando Magic and the Cleveland Cavaliers.

In reaction to the news of Amaechi's homosexuality, former All-Star Tim Hardaway-a self proclaimed homophobic-said, "I don't like gay people and I don't like to be around gay people. I wouldn't want him on my team. And you know I don't think he should be in the locker room while we're in the locker room. I wouldn't even be a part of that."

This locker room machismo is a definite factor in the small number of sportsmen who have decided to come out according to the LGBT officer of the USL, Laura Finlay. "Lockers rooms tend to be more homophobic environments but hopefully Cusack's coming out will provide young gay people with a role model as he is all man and openly gay at the same time."

Cusack has stated that he wished to be remembered as a hurler first and foremost, not a gay hurler. After his successful appearance on the Late Late show, there were a plethora of commentators saying our acceptance of Cusack shows how far we've come as a nation and the usual mealy-mouthed platitudes.

It is an indictment (if only a slight one in the grand scheme of things) that for the immediate future at least, he will remain best-known as "the gay hurler". This shows that being a gay sportsman is still regarded as being a novelty instead of being an accepted non-event.

Cusack was also interviewed by the London Times and Independent, showing that the gay-sportsman-as-novelty effect is not just an Irish phenomenon.

In coming out, Cusack has shown his trademark honesty and bravery, and we, as a nation should not congratulate ourselves too much for how well we've taken the news. We should treasure Cusack, not because he is a gay ambassador, but because he is one of the finest hurlers in the country, with three All-Ireland's in his pocket to prove it. When the fact that he is gay is, but a footnote to the many achievements, then we can applaud how far our nation has come, but just not quite yet.

By Andrew Purfield

UCD rivals

DIT 2-10
UCD 0-16

The DIT hurlers under the management team of Adrian Cummins, Niall Kelly, Paul Murphy, Sean Boucke and Padraig Donnelly came into this game unbeaten against St. Pats, DCU and GMIT respectively. They knew a win against their arch-rivals UCD would ease them into a semi final birth with DIT showing good glimpses of play for DIT on the day were Daniel Murphy, Sean Bourke and Padraig Donnelly came into this game scoring 3 unanswered points. DIT responded with another point from McGovern and 2 frees from Reid to leave the score tied at 0-6 apiece.

UCD began to gain a foothold in the game scoring 3 unanswered points. DIT responded with another point from McGovern and 2 frees from Reid to leave the game tied at 0-6 apiece.

UCD again found their feet quickly and went two points 0-8 to 0-6 ahead just after the half time cup of tea. The teams traded points to leave the game at 0-10 to 0-8 approaching the last quarter. It was at this stage that DIT got the bit of luck they badly needed. Kevin Reid struck a free from his own half back line all the way to the net. UCD hit back in style and went on to score 3 unanswered points to leave the score at 0-13 to 1-8 in favour of our lads.

The game finely balanced full forward McGovern then received a pass from David English and took off on a mazy 30 yard run, he duly feed Daniel Murphy who found the net with a first time pull. This score sent the DIT supporters into a frenzy. But UCD as usual had done throughout the game responded with two points to pull us back into the game. Kevin Reid grabbed a fantastic point on the turn from 50 yards out.

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As ex-NBA player and coach, Sam Mitchell said when questioned about tolerance of John Amaechi's coming out, "It shouldn't be about tolerance, it should be about respect. People should treat people as human beings, I wouldn't use the word tolerance. Are people supposed to tolerate me because I'm black? Or are they supposed to treat me with respect because I'm a human being?"

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We all say it, the referee's a complete w*nker, but maybe we're not so wrong. Our Sports Editor Paul Mc Nulty did a big of digging to see just how despicable the Refs really are.

The only constant in this season's Premier League has been the inconsistency of the top teams. Last season the 'Big Four' lost 17 games between them, but time around and after only a third of the season, they have already lost 12 games again in total.

This is indicative of the improved challenges from the likes of Aston Villa, Tottenham and Man. City, and perhaps more pertinently, the hastily demise of Liverpool's fortunes.

In this topsy-turvy season perhaps the only thing that can be relied on is Alex Ferguson's increasingly off-the-wall criticism of referees. Following their latest 1-0 defeat to Chelsea, Alex Ferguson again attacked the standard of refereeing in the Premier League.

Fergie felt the free-kick from which John Terry scored the winner should not have been awarded, and that Wes Brown was fouled as it went in. "You lose faith in refereeing, that's the way the players see it. The referee's position to make the decision was absolutely ridiculous."

This was Ferguson's third swipe at referees in quick succession, following his rant against referee Alan Wiley after Sunderland had the tenuity to draw 2-2 with Ferguson's charges. "He was not fit enough for a game of that standard," he said in an interview with MUTV following the game.

"The pace of the game demanded a referee who was fit. You see referees abroad who are as fit as butcher's dogs. We have some who are fit. He wasn't fit. He was taking 30 seconds to book a player. He was needing a rest. It was ridiculous," added Ferguson.

The United manager has since been forced to apologise on the club's official website "for any personal embarrassment [his] remarks may have caused". However, the head of the referees' union Alan Leighton was not satisfied with the Scot's apology, calling it "half-hearted", and he suggested that Ferguson be handed a ban for the original remarks.

This controversy was bad enough for the reputation of the sport, but excerpts of the controversial book have been leaked online. Donaghy claims that the corruption was not limited to him, but included other referees, and ranged all the way up to the NBA front office.

He claims that the 2002 Western Conference Finals between the Los Angeles Lakers and the Sacramento Kings (think the Champions League semi-final as a similar equivalent) were rigged at the order of the NBA top brass. The underdog-Sacramento were leading the best of seven series 3-2.

In a meeting before the sixth game, the league officials told the umpires that certain calls - calls that would have benefited the Lakers - were being missed by the referees. In the end Sacramento lost the game with the Lakers shooting 27 free throws to Sacramento's 9.

Donaghy went on to accuse another referee, Dick Bavetta of fixing games at the NBA's request to ensure the big-name, and more importantly big-money, teams went through in crucial games.

He made further revelations that the NBA used nefarious tactics to make sure that star players got more favourable calls. He cited the case of Raja Bell-a Phoenix Suns player who had the knack of being able to match up with Kobe Bryant.

Bryant is one of the NBA's marquee players, and at refereeing conferences, videos were shown of Bell. "The footage I analyzed usually illustrated fouls being called against Bell, rarely for him. The message was subtle but clear - call fouls against the star stopper because he's hurting the game," Donaghy alleged in the leaked extracts.

Overall, as bad as Ferguson thinks he has it, the antics of Donaghy and his allegations surely put the mistakes of Premier League referees in context. Ferguson is railing at their honest mistakes, while the NBA has to look into a whole systemic failure that allowed this corrupt criminality to flourish.

That side of things will be left in the capable hands of the supporters - and who better to kick things off in royal fashion with the Irish and fellow lovers of the sweet amber nectar, the Australians, a great bunch of lads.

Events on the pitch were almost as interesting, because our clash with the Wallabies at Croke Park last Sunday was measured up to be a very decent Test match. Even though it has become more and more commonplace in recent times, the visit of a major southern hemisphere power in the autumn still whets the appetite.

Of course that's largely down to the quality of the opposition, but where it's the fulfilment of admiring their superior brand of rugby, now it's about trying to beat them, outplay them and prove that we really do have a rightful place at the game's top table.

The feel good factor that emerged from last season's magnificent Grand Slam triumph is still hanging around, thankfully, even now all of eight months later. Sure it feels more like a mere few weeks ago to the Wardmeister, as he reflects fondly on that dramatic day in Cardiff, when finally all the bad times and bad memories did not only stop flowing, but flowed away.

That did not fill our mastermind coach Declan Kidney with any fanciful notions, however, as he's now back to plotting the next forward for his side and the quest for greater glories. By mixing up the squad with a batch of new players, the canny Corkman has kept the players on their toes in the knowledge that places, even in the extended squad, are not easy to nail down.

With that said, the frontline squad was a smart selection at this stage with plenty of strength and experience.

Cian Healy was ready to step up to the plate in the front row and played an absolute blinder. Bob Casey and Leo Cullen are now also viable contenders for the engine room.

Scrum-half Tomas O'Leary is back in fine form from Munster after serious injury, and we were of the opinion that places, even in the extended squad, are not easy to nail down.

Drico's 79th minute try was a gift from rugby gods.

The big selection dilemma for Kidney, of course, is now for the most important position on the pitch at out-half. The Reginator's kicking game, and distribution were a thing of beauty, nonetheless Jonny Sexton's brilliant form for Leinster stretching back to last season's heroes still make him impossible to ignore despite Rog's best efforts. This is the start of a long running dual for the jersey.

Wardstradamus - staring into his crystal rugby ball - reckons we have a great year ahead of us.

I'm optimistic, God help me.