

Needles and Pins

By BARRY O'HARA

You'd be surprised how comfortable you feel when you're being pummelled by five or six other blokes. After the initial pain and general shock from the first wave of attack, your body becomes accustomed to getting the shit kicked out of it. It switches to fortress mode, a surprisingly comfortable state, in so much as you're no longer in control of your own vessel. The muscles clench up with a tremendous cramp like sensation, and the arms position themselves to protect the major organs, especially the head. This is serious, I'm still being hit, and kicked, and punched, and head-butted. This is really fuckin serious; there must be at least five of the bastards. I'm being engulfed in pins and needles; blow after blow sends them all over my body until I become a limp inactive punch bag, brimming with tingling sensations inside. As I try desperately to regain some sort of balance or bearing I'm kicked swiftly in the face, and it all spins round again. My feeble, fumbling attempts at some sort of counter strike fail miserably; I swing aimlessly into the humid Mallorcan air and fall flat on my face. All hand eye co-ordination has completely ceased, I am completely defenceless now, I haven't got a hope.

All of a sudden I become aware of a conflict within my quivering body. The logical thinking part of my brain that's worried about the severity of this attack is at odds with some mechanical, pre-installed ordinance that's telling my body to shut down. Surely I have to stay conscious, they might kill me! I have to struggle like some cornered boar for my precious life. It's like when your computer gets a little pop-up that says 'windows has encountered an error and needs to shut down'. What do you do if you get one of those messages whilst typing your Master's thesis? A 20,000 word behemoth of academic excellence, which unfortunately you hadn't saved yet. The answer is simple; you just stare at the box, paralysed by dumbfounded inaction. You read the words over and over, 'encountered', 'error', 'needs'? The words seem familiar, yet their meaning is completely alien to the words you learned phonetically in primary school. Maybe if you don't touch anything the problem will just disappear? You eventually realize that you have options, 'send error report' or 'Don't send'.

‘Fuckin heaaaaaaallllp!’

The inevitable punch to the throat only confirms my suspicions, shouting is pointless. It’s futile giving hope to the notion that some drunkard staggering home would hear me, and have enough brain cells still working in order to mount a rescue attempt. No, that would never happen, no drunk wants to get involved with six vicious thugs kicking the life out of some poor cunt. For all the bastard knew I was probably some child molester getting my comeuppance. I’m sure that thought alone would make him walk on; safely knowing that he can enjoy his saliva drenched kebab without the constant niggling of his ravaged conscience. No no, I have no option to send a so called ‘error report’ I am definitely alone in this, how very existential of me. Oh who am I fuckin kidding, I’m a piss head in a piss head palace getting the piss beaten out of me, it’s no fuckin tragedy. If I die, the corrupt bastards that run this god forsaken island would probably announce that I was killed in a drunken attempt to play chicken with a freight train, completely my fault.

My system won’t shut down, although my body is motionless and limp, there’s a hell of a fight going on inside me. I am forced to stare at this raw unanswerable error message. I begin to yearn for twilight as yet another fist collides with the back of my head, or was it a foot or knee perhaps? Defiantly a fist, yea, definitely, I feel like a fuckin whop-ass connoisseur. Every blow that strikes me now is being judged and laughed at by my nervous system. Which is ironic, as it is far from nervous,

‘Come on you fuckers! Give this bastard something he’s gonna really fuckin remember, blind the cock sucker! After all the shit he puts us through every weekend with that god awful cocaine and booze! fuck him up!’

The lack of any preceding threats and the absence of any pain have put me in a strange mood. I don’t feel scared, just curious, perplexed by the strange way my mind and body are communicating with each other. The punches feel like heavy sodden sandbags being dropped on my head from a great height, I can sense every connection, every thrust of my neck as it is violently jolted in another direction. I start to get worried about the length of this assault, they’re still going, why are they doing this? Jesus Christ!, they really must be doing some damage, every swift second is morphing eerily into a drawn out moment of contemplation, where I’m helpless to do anything but watch every detail of this grim pounding in slow motion, with encapsulating camera angles and concise commentary from John Motson.

‘Oh my word I think he’s going to need some treatment.’

I start to pray for that sweet blow that will send me to slumber and take me away from this horrid situation, this ugly testament to the raw, unprovoked malevolence of man. The fight that is raging inside me is growing to a terrifying proportion, there's some part of me that's refusing to give up, why? Oh Jesus Christ no, no please this can't be rape; the world can't be that cruel. Two of them get my legs and raise them in the air, what the fuck are they doing? They're going for my dick! No, no oh, ahhh! There going through my pockets, thank god, I couldn't take that, being raped by six big blokes on holiday, no way, I'd probably die as soon as I realised it was happening. That kind of utter evil would probably trigger some in built self destruct; I would immediately be able to explode my own heart with my mind, in built neuro-chemical cyanide. What the fuck? The two in front of me are taking my trainers off my feet!

'Ghit de cunts shews!'

Did I actually see that? Did I actually see them take my trainers off my feet? My utter disbelief is cut short by prudent messages being sent to my brain via my ears, which still seem to be able to decipher dialectical distinctiveness with some aplomb. They're fuckin Scoucers! Why do I get that, of all the neurotransmitters that are not finding their destination at the moment, why do I have to hear that? I can't feel my head, my arms seem foreign, and all motor-neuron capability has ceased. My pitiless brain lets me hear that the cunts who are killing me for no fucking reason whatsoever are Scoucers! Of course, fuckin brain! The realisation triggers some old prejudice, which immediately puts me at ease about the whole trainer thing, they're Scoucers, they're beating me and taking my trainers, that seems to make sense to the garrison of logic still somehow functioning in my battered head. Scoucers are dirty thieving cunts. It's like these fuckers can read my mind, there beating me like they can.

What the fuck have I done to deserve this? I don't understand. It's as if the first blow knocked me in to stream-of-consciousness mode, where every Scouce related obscenity that flows through my thought channels is somehow being broadcast through my nostrils, enraging these rotten scum-fucks. The fight within me is dissipating, I think some primal instinct realises that there not here to kill me, there only after my valuables, but why was there no threats, no sickly pre-mugging dialogue? I'm sure the mere presence of six unruly Scouce thugs is enough for any man to give up his Reebok Classics without so much as a whimper. I try my hardest to think back to the precursor moments; earlier in the night.

Did I give someone a dirty look? Did I flick a chip at a fat girl? No, what, urrrgh. Holy fuck.....

They've gone, I'm sure of it, am I awake? Where am I? Am I okay? Have I just woken up? Was I unconscious? I'm aware of my brain functioning only, like before everything is slowed to an agonisingly timid creep. I can feel something wrong with my arm, the brave limb has taken the brunt of the attack, it has done a sterling job of protecting the head, but all is not well. Their final farewell was some sort of stamp, I think hideously concentrated on my arm, god it feels weird. I try to see exactly where I am, but all I can see is tall grass lurching violently towards my face, I daren't open my eyes.

My mind is taken back to earlier in the night. I remember the girl; she was beautiful, what was her name? I was in an incredibly crowded bar with the lads, and I had hooked up with this very attractive young lady from Wigan, god knows what her name was though. Enthused by a mad concoction of cheap Mallorcan booze and flaky hashish I attained the young maiden's affection with some skill and pizzazz. Which was some result considering the fact that I wasn't exactly the most sought-after male in our group. All had gone according to plan, after the bar closed me, Billy, my girl, and her friend set off towards their hotel. Billy had done the job that had to be done; he made sure my girl's friend was kept occupied. There's nothing worse when you're trying to get laid than a third wheel who isn't getting any attention herself. You can guarantee she would have subconsciously done everything in her power to end my exquisite courtship.

Billy was pig drunk though, and that's where things started to go wrong. We had walked for about twenty minutes searching for their hotel through the illogically mangled back roads of this sweaty town. My vexation at this mammoth trek was formidably out shadowed by my sexual anticipation, I couldn't wait to get this streamlined beauty into her hotel room and hear her purr. And neither could she for that matter, there was nothing in her mannerisms during the walk to suggest that sex was not on the agenda. She took every opportunity to gently stroke my shoulder, and I took every opportunity to get my hand as close as possible to her bum, it was pure chemistry. Outside their hotel we waited for Billy and the other girl, who were somewhat further behind us. I hadn't noticed it until then, but Billy was staggering dramatically, barely able to stand, the poor fucker's a twenty-two year old alcoholic, what can you say. As they got closer I started to get a burning sensation in the pit of my stomach, something was wrong. Billy's girl had a face on that would make Mussolini's mother weep, her arms were folded and she wasn't walking,

she was marching. She came straight up to us and took my girl by the hand to one side, just far enough away that I couldn't hear them speak. As I tried in vain to lip read an arm slid across my shoulder,

'Whs happennin youe boat head, haws yiur pussy deein youe cunt.'

Jesus, I could barely make the fucker out, and I got an eye full of phlegm for trying.

'What the fuck did you do man, what did you say to her?' I feared the worst.

'Whoe? That fat fuckeen fat slosh, I goata get a browne bag for that mutts hed, stuped fuckin bitch, bitch!' He bellowed the second bitch, and by then I knew everything was fucked. When they came back they made some feeble excuse about not being allowed guests in the hotel and started to leave. My girl must have noticed the dismayed look on my face,

'We'll meet you back in that bar tomorrow night at about ten yea, when your mate's sober, sorry.' She said it softly, she knew I wasn't a happy chappy. I couldn't look at Billy, there's some ugly history between us and I know I would entertain the notion that he fucked things up for me on purpose.

'C'mon geeza, lits git a fuckin kebab, bare chilli sause ha ha wankaer!'

'Fuck off Billy, don't fucking come near me you fuckin piss head prick'. My tone ensured that he didn't follow me, I stormed off back in the direction of the main strip, alone and frustrated. What was I going to do? The thought had only entered my head for a brief second when I saw the sign, KFC, there's nothing quite like finger licking chicken to perk up a downtrodden soul.

Oh fuck, I've got to get up. I'm lying face down with a mixture of sand, rubble and litter surrounding me. I try to look around to see which way my hotel is, but my body isn't working properly. A long, strained attempt to push my face up from the dirt only results in my face abrading against the ground in a circular motion. I'm sure the coarse rocks and pebbles are cutting my skin but that isn't important, I've got to get up.

In the distance I can see a blur of neon lights, all dilating and merging into a distorted psychedelic mess. A kaleidoscope of garbled colours and letters, that all seem to be throbbing towards me. That must be the strip, my hotel is in the other direction, come on! Get up! Everything is spinning around at an incredible pace as I somehow manage to get on my knees; they've really knocked the fuck out of me. I wait for it to pass but it isn't

going, it feels like I've drunk a barrel of matured Irish whisky, the kind that has sat in a rotten Dublin beer cellar for the last thirty years.

I compose myself for a minute and then go for it; in my haste I get up too quickly and stagger violently 15 yards forward. As I start to fall I instinctively put my arms out to cushion my landing, only the right arm acquiesces and I take another blow to the face as my chin hits the ground at a frenetic pace. I roll over to inspect my precious limb, and my fears are confirmed, my left arm is broken. It isn't obvious at first glance, but after further inspection I realise that my elbow is usually on the other side. Vicious fuckin Scouse cunts, why? What the fuck did I do to them to deserve this fuckin mauling? For a brief second despair starts to kick in and my eyes start to well up. No! This is no time for weakness, I must be strong now, nobody will find me here.

I remember now how the thing started; I was getting closer to my hotel, along the quiet outskirts of the town. On my left was a barren stretch of wasteland, full of wispy long grass that was pale, and obviously starved of nourishment. It was also peppered with jagged rocks, stones, pebbles, and countless amounts of litter, a dire skit of a place that not even a snake would call home. Invariably this land will probably be bought up by some greedy sweat-drenched Spaniard, who will turn it into an overpriced two-star hotel, as the unethical development of this god-forsaken island continues.

I didn't see many people in those final stages of my walk home; in fact there was absolutely no human contact, no provocation, no angry exchanges, nothing. Maybe the occasional mumble from myself about 'cock blocks' and 'piss-heads', but no agro of any kind. As I walked along some 150 meters away from my hotel, out the corner of my right eye I noticed someone running towards me. My initial reaction was to smile as I turned to face them, thinking it was one of the lads coming to greet me in a typically jovial, testosterone fuelled way. How wrong I was. I had just about deciphered that I did not recognise the assailant who was sprinting at full tilt towards me, and nearly managed to finish my quizzical "what the fu?" when boom! The impact was incredible, he flew and rugby tackled me to the ground. The impact must have hurt him as much as it hurt me, as there was a two foot drop from the pavement on to this wasteland. I figured I had a chance as we tussled and tumbled around in a frantic huddle. That's when the others showed up, all of a sudden I could feel fist after fist fly accurately at my face, and they dragged me some distance further into this cess pit, so no one could see or hear.

Now here I am, devoid of all normal capability, bleeding like a bastard, and with a head spinning like a demented merry-go-round. No trainers on my feet, no money in my pockets, and an elbow protruding strangely from its socket. I have never felt more helpless than at this precise moment, I am completely enslaved to the whim of fate. I begin to wonder about my choices, and all the different ways this night could have gone for me. If Billy hadn't fucked my chances with the Wigan girl, or if I hadn't gone to KFC. Is there any meaning to all this? I would be put at ease if I knew that I had provoked those fuckers, if there had been some altercation, some import. There was nothing, no threats, no build up, just pure, manic, vicious, violence.

Lying here looking up at the stars I start to feel comfortable again, the panic that set in, and the desperate need to get help has all but gone. I'll be fine here for a bit, get some strength back. My head has to lie tilting to the right, so the flow of dusty blood is diverted from my eyes.

The Mallorcan sky is crystal clear; dark and portentous, with the freshness of morning just on the cusp. I can see every star twinkle superbly above me like God has just finished painting it, and the paints still shiny and clean. I feel glad that I can see the precious dawn trickle into existence, as night fades away reluctantly in the sky to my left. I close my eyes and listen to the sounds of this heaving town gently winding away into the morning, the occasional traffic, and the sombre drunken bellows echoing all around me.

It must be nearing six; the sun will be fully out soon. I start to think about the girl and feel great regret, as somehow, I don't think I'll be there to meet her tomorrow night.