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Forbidden foods

FROM LUSCIOUSLY TEMPTING FRUIT IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN AND THE INSANE PASSIONS BEHIND THE NOT-SO-HUMBLE TOMATO, TO THE HORRORS OF PORK AND THE GENOCIDE THAT IT HAS ENGENDERED. FRANK COLES EXPLORES STEWART LEE ALLEN'S TAKE ON HOW THESE RULES HAVE SHAPED OUR WORLD AND THE DIVERSE AND INTRIGUING WAYS WE'VE BROKEN THEM.

Food is not just about cooking or the latest diet, it is the main course in which the meanings of time and culture enter our lives. However, it is argued that meals today have lost their social and spiritual meaning – no longer can we tell the time of day or year by the smells of the special foods being cooked, nor can we meditate on their deeper meanings. The food laws of holidays like Easter, Passover or Ramadan were a crucial part of a multi-sensory celebration of nature, religion and morality; lessons often forgotten in our new artificial Eden, in which everything is immediate, rude, meaningless and disposable.

VERY SWEET THINGS

Sex and food are inextricably linked together in a sensual mash of historical desire, religious propaganda and moral outrage. beginning in the Garden of Eden with the apple, a perfectly innocent fruit that was demonised by the church, in a medieval propaganda war that set the southern European grape loving Catholic Christian states against the apple-loving Celtic Christian northerners. It is a food loving battle mirrored in Islam and South

American cultures that ultimately makes a villain out of the innocent apple.

A similar fate befell the tomato after Columbus discovered it on the Orinoco River, which he, his crew and his financiers believed to be the gateway to Eden. So when he brought this luscious newcomer back from the New World, everyone presumed it was the forbidden fruit

as “Evil fruit... treacherous and deceitful”.

The penultimate food to fall victim to the lusty machinations of the human mind was Chocolate. It is a food that has enraged passions since its discovery by the Mayans where it was consumed by the ruling classes. Its value was such that the Cocoa beans were used as currency. The only time commoners got a taste was

“*The urge to break the rules is the most human of pleasures - Stewart Lee Allen*”

mentioned in the bible and dubbed it the ‘Love Apple’. What made the tomato particularly terrifying to Europeans was its similarity to the plant Mandrake. It was known as an aphrodisiac and was thought to be God’s first attempt to make humans, as visually the roots resemble a withered, shrunken human body. By association this, and other beliefs such as, it could only be grown from the semen of hanged criminals, led to Christians snubbing this blasphemous fruit until the 17th Century. It was still considered evil even in the 20th Century where Henri LeClerc described it

when they were marked for sacrifice, it was considered a symbol of the heart, and it is this ‘love’ connection that has endured. It remained, until very recently, the preserve of the wealthy and its popularity soon blossomed. European ladies living in the New World would drink the local ‘chocolate champagne’ during mass, the church condemned this behaviour which led to an avalanche of conflict, including sword fights, poisoned priests and a campaign of terror, led by the ladies against “the enemy of chocolate in the Church”. These grand dames went on

to introduce Chocolate to the French courts where it became intimately linked to aristocratic sadism and became known as 'Sadean Chocolate'. Its success was ensured by Madame de Pompadour and the dominatrix Madame du Barry's insatiable desire for its sweet taste. It became a part of the language of politics, scandalous sexual practices and represented the sheer decadence of the European aristocracy.

“ Sex and food are inextricably linked... ”

Lust colours our everyday ideas of food, most of us now judge the worth of a dish largely on how guilty we feel about eating it – and if it's not considered “sinful” we find it less pleasant and therefore less appealing.

DEATH AT THE DINNER TABLE

Violence, remains a hidden, but necessary act before food even reaches the table. Until very recently animals were tortured to death to provide better meat and guests could watch their meals expire in a variety of colourful ways in order to arouse the palate. It was originally observed that anger and a good appetite were inextricably linked.

Today one of the fastest growing trends of the 21st Century is vegetarianism. Health is usually the motivation given, but the belief that eating meat causes angry emotions is an underlying motive and is prevalent in everything from the bible to Oliver Twist (Mr Bumble. “It's the meat, ma'am...”). Lawyers defending accused murderers used to argue their clients became killers because of the prevalence of Butcher shops, similar to the argument today that violent films create more violence in society. Several questions arise; the epiphanic nature of conversion to vegetarianism, surveys showing people believe veggies are morally superior, statistics showing vegetarian societies have curiously lower amounts of violence.

The problem is people like Adolf Hitler, a devout veggie more famous for his murderous appetites, planned to turn the entire German people into vegetarians.

How can the fear of violence be minimised, in the potentially dangerous environment of dinner with its sharpened knives and dead bodies? The introduction of sauces and service a la russe (food carved out of sight) was the antidote in the 1800's. Today our supermarkets shelter

the consumer from any idea of slaughter or violence, where the blood or shape of an animal is either removed or disguised. Instead 'faux violence' has been engineered into our eating habits, crisps are actually designed to replicate the sound effects associated with violence, while the French aperitif kir is champagne stained blood red in violence.

HOLY COWS AND JEWISH PIGS

D. N. Jha, a Delhi University historian, is currently in fear for his life for merely suggesting that Hindus once ate cattle some thousand years ago. The Hindu taboo against beef as a kind of blasphemy affects over one billion people today, making it one of the largest in the world. It's also the most politically charged at this point, with McDonalds routinely being razed for failing to notify the faithful that beef products appear in their french fries. Examining the scientific reasons for this ancient law, as well as exploring some of the more fascinating religious beliefs such as the eating of cow dung uncovers any number of spectacular mishaps to recount, most notably how the British caused the Great Indian Mutiny by forcing native soldiers to use bullets greased with both pig and cow fat, thus very cleverly offending both Hindu and Muslim

“ Faux Violence has been engineered into our eating habits ”

conscripts. A gruesome war, it had a fascinating culinary sub-theme. Hindu forces communicated via coded baked goods. Brits sewed captured Hindu soldiers alive into cow carcasses. Some Indians even loaded their cannons with cans of potted Fortnum & Mason shrimp.

It all might seem mad to us today, but history shows us we have often used food as the means to usurp our neighbours. The Jewish aversion to pork was used by Christians to excuse some of the most horrific acts of violence in history. It began with a curious Eastern European tale of how a rabbi tried to expose Christ as a fraud by demanding Christ tell him what lay sleeping under a barrel. The Rabbi thought it was a pig, but unbeknownst to him, his own son lay there sleeping. When Christ said the Rabbi's son was sleeping there, the Rabbi laughed. In revenge, Christ turned the boy into a pig and ever since Jews have refused to eat pork in case they eat their own children.

This curious little tale eventually evolved into the belief that Jews were actually a

kind of pig. Jewish women were said to have horizontal vaginas; circumcision was said to be akin to the castration performed on pigs, and some butchers started wearing costumes parodying Rabbi's outfits; Jews were forced to take court oaths standing on a sow's carcass, i.e., on their “mother's body”. The beliefs eventually became the judensau image still seen on many East European churches that shows Jews suckling on a pig, an image that Martin Luther used in some particularly vicious anti-Semitic writings. It was an incredibly popular concept and according to some scholars played an important role in the “de-humanising” of Jews that led to the Nazi Holocaust. Christian Women who had sex with Jews were forced to stand in the street with signs identifying themselves as sows.

On the flip side, fake Jewish-to-Christian converts, called morranos, started eating ham in public to prove their “Christianity.” At one point Christians and Jews hung hams outside their homes to escape harassment. This seems to have led to the tradition of in some parts of eating ham at Easter to prove that it was a Christian Easter feast as opposed to a Jewish Passover. There were even priests who roamed the streets of Madrid sniffing

the air for wafts of Jewish cooking, as well as cookbooks put out by the Catholic church identifying blasphemous cooking. Hundreds were burnt alive during this campaign.

Cows have even had their day in Europe: some historians believe that so-called “witchcraft” cults viciously suppressed in the Middle Ages were an outgrowth of an ancient reverence for cattle and other horned animals similar to those found in the Hindu faith.

Inspiring a new fascination with the everyday foodstuffs in our kitchens, where the innocuous cocoa bean becomes an object of desire; the egg an essential ingredient of decadence and a symbol of the soul, the overlooked slice of ham at the back of the fridge, a reason to go to war.

Stuart Lee Allen uncovers more of the fascinating history of outlawed culinary habits in his book :

In The Devil's Garden

£7.99 Canongate Books Ltd.

<title>Justin Kerrigan</title> who can you trust?

Justin Kerrigan was just 24 when he wrote and directed his first feature - the seminal club culture film of 1999 *Human Traffic*. The film remains a timely memoir to a now by-gone age of early dance culture in the UK, adding to the legacy of earlier youth cultures captured on celluloid, from the dangerous rebellion of Brando's "The Wild One" to the musical "Beat Street" of 1980's Hip-Hop culture. Kerrigan captured this fleeting moment of youth during the last gasp of the second millennium. However in the last few years we've heard little from him apart from when the occasional controversy surrounding the finances of *Human Traffic* appears in the press as a cautionary tale to wannabe filmmakers.

Kerrigan sold the rights to the film to his tutor from university, Allan Niblo, who proceeded to pocket the profits and leave Kerrigan answering questions from the cast and crew as to when they would see their share. With a strong Cardiff connection to this day, does he still have to face flak regarding the issue of payment which shrouds the film?

"Those who know me, and those people I'm still in contact with from the cast and crew know exactly what the deal is. Unfortunately every now and again I do bump into someone that's heard a rumour that because I'm the director and the film



obviously did well in Britain that I'm actually connected to the Producer Allan Niblo and that I've been paid. There's no one who's been more fucked over than myself. During a meeting with the producers Allan was saying there's money coming in now, we should pay ourselves and I said hang on a minute, we've got to pay everyone else first. That's the deal.


At the end of the meeting there was an agreement to do that and basically that was the end of it. As a result he didn't pay anyone."

Deferred payment films are now common practice in the UK. Unfortunately most films do not make money and if they do the investors' needs usually outweigh those of the technicians, actors or directors.

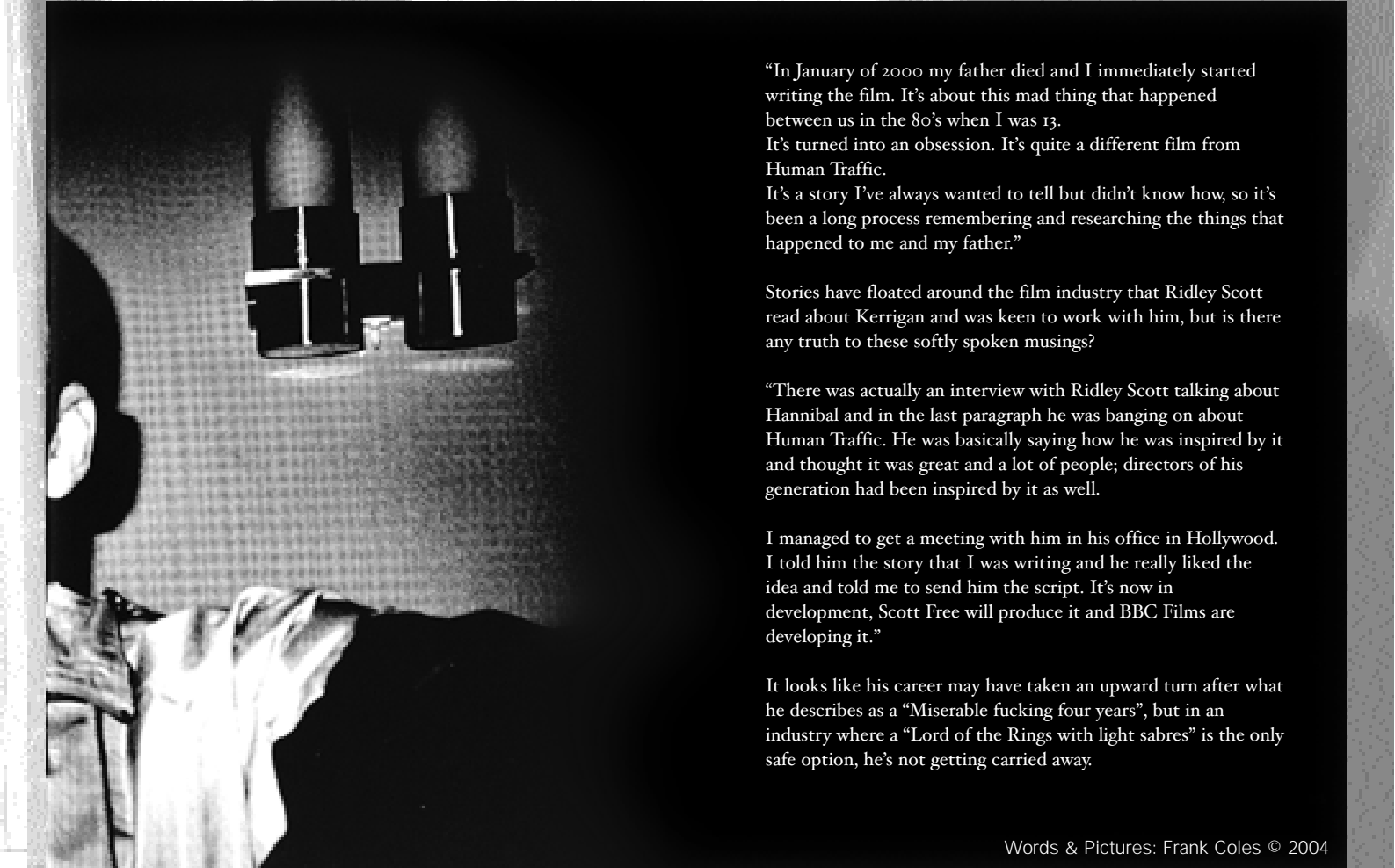
"I haven't been paid a penny for writing and directing *Human Traffic*. Basically where I fucked up was when I came out of college and signed a contract with Allan Niblo, my tutor. I couldn't afford a lawyer. I was on the dole and I trusted him. It was one of the biggest mistakes I ever made because I basically signed my life away. I sold the rights away for one pound and I didn't even get the pound! What a tight bastard!"

With this much baggage to carry it could be easy to let the villains walk all over you. Kerrigan had been working on a promise of payment for over two years and was descending deeper into debt. After promoting the film around the world Miramax finally bought the film for distribution and offered the still young director a personal two-year development deal. This took place shortly before tragedy struck inspiring the course of his current work.





WE
CAN
YOU
TRUST?



"In January of 2000 my father died and I immediately started writing the film. It's about this mad thing that happened between us in the 80's when I was 13. It's turned into an obsession. It's quite a different film from Human Traffic.

It's a story I've always wanted to tell but didn't know how, so it's been a long process remembering and researching the things that happened to me and my father."

Stories have floated around the film industry that Ridley Scott read about Kerrigan and was keen to work with him, but is there any truth to these softly spoken musings?

"There was actually an interview with Ridley Scott talking about Hannibal and in the last paragraph he was banging on about Human Traffic. He was basically saying how he was inspired by it and thought it was great and a lot of people; directors of his generation had been inspired by it as well.

I managed to get a meeting with him in his office in Hollywood. I told him the story that I was writing and he really liked the idea and told me to send him the script. It's now in development, Scott Free will produce it and BBC Films are developing it."

It looks like his career may have taken an upward turn after what he describes as a "Miserable fucking four years", but in an industry where a "Lord of the Rings with light sabres" is the only safe option, he's not getting carried away.

DUBLIN

KILLARNEY

KENNEMARE

FANTASY IRELAND

Geography no longer limits us to where we live and work thanks to the technological tools of our information age.

By Frank Coles

The authors of the book *Digital Nomad* pose the question, is this the age where people will be able to ask themselves “Am I a nomad or a settler?” Over the last ten years I have come to consider myself a modern nomad having lived and worked in towns and cities all over Europe and North America. Happily, I have now decided to settle in Dublin in the Republic of Ireland. Having travelled here repeatedly since August of 2003 I find myself smitten with the literary and creative history of the place and the people.

I have often been informed by friends and colleagues of the rapturous beauty of Ireland. However, spending most of my waking hours in the backs of cabs, offices, hotel rooms and friend’s apartments I had so far seen virtually nothing to confirm or deny their reports of this small but inspiring island.

So in May 2004 in the middle of a busy, no days off, month long schedule I decided to pursue the highly praised beauty that so far I had only captured fleeting glimpses of from within Dublin’s city limits. I was eager to make this the first outing of many in discovering the country’s charms.

So what does a so-called ‘digital nomad’ do just after they’ve decided to settle? Well, I threw my tent, laptop, digital camera and unsuffering girlfriend into the back of my hardy little Renault 19 and headed for what is reportedly the most stunning part of the country - the Kerry Peninsula.

On The Road

Whenever possible I like to drive in a country I’m unfamiliar with for no other reason than it helps me become acclimatised to my surroundings and if I like the look of somewhere, stop. Something not

usually afforded by train, plane or bus. The online guide at www.aa.ie provided us with a route of just four and a half hours from Dublin to Kenmare the first town at at the beginning of the road around the peninsula known locally as “The Ring of Kerry.”

The first time on the road in a foreign land is usually accompanied by frustration, cursing and a great deal of head thumping - Ireland was no different. Especially in the opening stages. Irish drivers routinely sit about two feet off your rear bumper on both local roads and the motorways. If you slow or pullover to let them pass you’ll find they weren’t hustling to overtake you at all, that’s just how they drive and how they live life, up close and personal.

Admittedly not everyone drives like that and when you hit one of the new dual carriageways you will find yourself flying past near-stationary cars on the inside lane as everybody slows to a relative crawl. When quizzing a Dublin cab driver about this he replied “Life is stressful enough, why rush to get there? Just sit back and enjoy the ride.”

Maybe so, but seven and a half hours later after driving through the flat, green, monotonous countryside of the midlands you begin to wonder, so where is this gorgeous place, this fantasy Ireland that everyone describes in longing tones? You soon find out after reaching Killarney the gateway town to the Kerry peninsula, a colourful town buzzing with the activity of holiday makers at the numerous hotels. Killarney is the most commercialised town on the Kerry trail, but thankfully, not Las Vegas commercial. On leaving Killarney the mountains begin to rise out of the flat nowhere of the last seven hours and you can almost feel the impact of tectonic plates crashing into each other beneath your feet as these magnificent rock faces rear up in front of you.

The scenery genuinely inspires reverence and if the happily



meandering sheep don't encourage you to pull over and take a gulp of the cool mountain air then the soaring mountain tops, atmospheric lighting, deep lush valleys filled with lakes and waterfalls certainly will. It is the kind of scenery that reminds you drama isn't just for the movies.

In fact the scenery is so stunning that we were obligingly asked to pull over by the local police - the gardai, pronounced gardee. The reason for this was the convoy of coaches and cars carrying, the Irish environment Minister and the upper echelons of the European parliament on their way back from taking in the best that Kerry has to offer as part of the European expansion celebrations.

Under The Stars

In complete contrast to the bigwigs of the EU we opted for a pleasing night in a tent under a starlit sky rather than a hotel to make the most of our surroundings. We checked in to The Ring of Kerry campsite a short distance from the town of Kenmare. The campsite caters for both caravans and campers and offers electrical and plumbing hook ups, as well as washing, shower, laundry facilities and recreation room. at the very reasonable price of €15 per night.

With our pockets jingling with spare cash for such reasonable accommodation we headed into Kenmare to explore the shopping and restaurants. This small and pretty town offers a wide range of shopping and eating using local produce on all of the menus and clothing and home furnishings also designed and made

"It is the kind of scenery that reminds you drama isn't just for the movies."

by the craftsmen and women of the area. Still nomadic but not fully weaned from my digital fixes I headed for the local bank to make use of the ATM before we satiated our appetites on good old fashioned Irish Stew and a local fish dish of salmon filo pastry in a mussel sauce. Followed by a hearty dessert of sticky toffee pudding and strawberry tart to warm us in our beds. Including a couple of pints of the sparkling Irish bitter Smithwicks the tab came to a reasonable €37.

Stepping Out

On waking the next morning we plotted our route around the Ring of Kerry. On the map it looks a small journey but a quick calculation shows that the ring is over 200 kilometres in length and the roads take sharp, orphan making twists through a seemingly inexhaustive supply

of delicate green woodlands and cliff-top roads along the main estuary that leads out to the Atlantic.

Making sure laptops and mobile phones were securely turned off and hidden away in the trunk of the car. We decided to strike out as far as we could in the only day we were to have on the peninsula. We observed new housing developments all around the area that is proving so popular with visitors that they just won't leave. The houses range from the tacky, mass produced variety to stunning stone houses at prices that just about anyone can afford. Ireland being one of the Celtic homelands means it is perfectly possible to find humble abodes with standing stone circles on the front lawn.

The locals range from the incredibly friendly and warm-hearted to monosyllabic in the picture-perfect village of Sneem. Further up the road and slightly off the beaten track out of the corner of my eye I glimpse a deserted and unspoiled beach just before the tiny village of Castle Cove. Glorious off-white sands surround and so few people have ventured this way that you could count the footprints of the passers-by before us. Six humans, one dog.

We braved the calm, clear prism of the Atlantic Ocean and although the pleasantly chilled waters demand you grow a few hairs on your chest they were the most clean and pleasant of any European shoreline I've experienced in the last 20 years.

With the day nearly over we retired back to the campsite just over the road from the mouth of the Kenmare River. So smitten were we with this ever so green and pleasant land that we tried to find a house for sale that we saw advertised in the window of a local Kenmare estate agent. €198,000, four beds, a half acre of land with views and it's own wood. In Ireland that is a steal, a tiny one-bed apartment in Dublin would set you back over €300k.

We couldn't find our dream house, the local street signs sending us on our own little magical mystery tour with differing distances to everywhere from everywhere. You can travel to a place 12km away and still be 12km away when you get there.

Reluctantly next morning we headed back to the city, relinquishing our fantasies of a tranquil and affordable country retreat. Leaving unexplored the numerous island's, beaches, villages and mountain passes on the Ring of Kerry. Vowing to return to let the nomad free on this part of Ireland that finally revealed to me what all those longing looks from my friends and colleagues had really meant. ●