

**At the End of March 2005, Stephen J Martin flew from Sydney to
Dublin for the launch of his first novel, Superchick.
He blogged it.**

Chapter IV - A New Hope...

Just thought I'd try my hand at a blog - so many people were emailing me to wish me well and let me know they're delighted with the success of the Superchick launch that I realised I'd never be able to write back to them all. So, first of all, thanks heaps everyone for the support - you're the best!! I figured it might be easier to keep everyone updated on all the goss this way - not to mention the fact that I'd have the memories safe and sound for when I'm looking back on my very first book launch (woo-hoo) and waxing lyrical about 'the early days'.

So anyway I flew in from Sydney, via Kuala Lumpur and Amsterdam and, as per feckin usual, found myself staring morosely at a baggage carousel in Dublin airport that was conspicuous for the lack of a certain bag that I was rather hoping had made the trip with me. Nope - around twenty other similarly fuming passengers and I were directed to the lost baggage counter where a smiling Aer Lingus girl took our details. I swear I have my own file in that place at this stage. At least I'd seen it coming this time and managed to be second in the queue. The American gentleman in front of me was fit to be tied. He had three kids hanging off a plastic wife with comical breasts and about a dozen suitcases on three trolleys. Two other cases were missing. The most vexing part of the whole thing for him was that he'd been made pay excess baggage in Amsterdam. How could you make someone pay the extra dosh and then lose the extra bags, he wanted to know? Where was the supervisor? Get him out here! He wasn't moving until he was satisfied.

I couldn't take it any more. I tapped him on the shoulder while the girl was on the phone and told him that he should try the other Lost Baggage counter at the other end of the hall. I had an American friend and he swore by that one. Off he marched as I handed the girl a piece of paper with all my details and a description of my bag - I'd been busy while I queued, no gobshite me. I told her I'd call her later. Bye bye. Oh, that American bloke is just gone to the toilet by the way and he'll be back in a minute. Thanks v. much.

Met the folks outside and nearly got my head pulled off by a very affectionate Mammy-hug. Walked out into the bright April Irish afternoon. My eyeballs immediately froze open, the air was like a brillo pad going down my throat as I tried to catch a breath. I haven't experienced a winter worth talking about in about five years and was taken off guard. I swore in front of my mother. In fact, I swore and took the Holy Name all in one sentence and got a look that I haven't seen in a long time.

Anyway, an hour later all was forgiven and I was getting the works - sausage, rashers, pudding, toast, tea. I've been away twelve years and this is like a ritual if I come back any time south of about 2pm. Nothing like it. The fry, the weather, Mam talking herself into a frenzy, the missing bag...yep, I was home.

The Weekend Warrior...

Spent the weekend doing cool stuff like playing football with my brother's kids. They're getting big! He's also got a little baby daughter, just one month old. The pinkest little thing in the world! Gorgeous and all the more remarkable for the fact that we Martins don't really do girls. A stubborn link in the genes somewhere along the line means we specialise in fathering boys of higher-than-normal intelligence and good looks. That's just the way it is.

Anyway, celebrated my father's birthday with a nice meal in Malahide. I had venison. Never had it before and was a bit disappointed to find it a bit...well, chickeny actually. There you go. My eventful weekend. I beat some children at football and then ate Bambi. What a man!

Ah well - I had to take it easy...Superchick was being launched on Monday...

Models, intimate lunches, book signings, pints...

Ah yeah, this is what it's all about!!

Got up early and headed into town to meet Laura from Mercier Press. Got a bus to Connolly and then the Luas to Heuston to meet her off the 9:30 from Cork. Now, I know it's common for returning emigrants to bitch about Ireland. This isn't right, that doesn't work, they should do it this way, back in Australia...blah, blah,

blah. Did you read about that feckin bag that they lost on me? Well I ended up driving back to the airport to get it myself rather than wait for the muppets to send it on. Etc. We whinge all the time, right?

Well, I just wanted to say that the Luas is brilliant. Clean, fast, efficient. I couldn't imagine them doing a better job on it (except maybe to keep extending it) and it was a bit weird to find myself with nothing to bitch about. Good job, whoever is responsible for it!

Anyway, met the lovely Laura who is Mercier's brilliant and enthusiastic PR person. Back into Henry Street to meet with the Arnotts people. I'll post a timetable separately for all the stuff that's going on, but an actress/model the 'Superchick' (the also-lovely Helen from Cork, who I also met today) will be living in the window at Arnotts from 9am til 9pm this Thursday. After that I had a quick chat on the phone with Gerry Ryan's producer to confirm my interview with Gerry. Oh, yeah, I'll be heading into Donnybrook on Wednesday to talk to Gerry Ryan at 11am. Ye know the way you do.

Next stop was Easons on O'Connell Street, where I met some cool Easons people and signed about 50 copies of Superchick. Then it was up to the Dublin Bookshop on Grafton Street where I met some more cool people and signed all their Superchicks. Last stop in town was Hughes and Hughes, and yet more cool people, in the Stephens Green Centre and I signed all their books too.

Myself and Laura had lunch and a chat in a cool little place on Sth. Anne Street (a couple of small Guinnesses for me after my long morning), before heading out to the Easons distribution centre in Santry where I signed about 500 copies of Superchick destined for bookshops around the country. Laura said I was a brilliant book signer.

Back into town to drop Laura to the 6pm to Cork. We had a mad taxi driver from Tipp that reminded me of what we miss when we emigrate. Funny bloke. As I walked back into town to get myself a couple of pints, the phone rings and it's Laura from the train. We've scored another interview - a phone interview with Risteard Keating on Red FM in Cork at 10:15pm on Wednesday. Had two pints in the International Bar to celebrate, but they were only all right. Still, not a bad day!

Is this feckin cool or what??

Superchick is Irish Book of the Month in Easons - it's prominent in all the shops with cool displays and all. There's promotions going on in pubs and DART stations. To be honest, the campaign to date can't have been organised any better (thanks Mercier and especially Laura!) and with the press interest and the industry support - not to mention the support from all my mates (you lot!) there's really only one thing left... sales! I can't complain about exposure or anything like that. In fact, it's really up to the book now. Is it good enough to justify all this fuss? Will it catch? Will there be a Tipping Point?? Keep tuned...

Life Imitates Art...

You know that book where the lads head off to Donnybrook to get interviewed at RTE studios? It's brilliant apparently, that book. Well, there I found myself on the DART at 9am this morning, Sydney Parade-bound and filled to the gills with coffee (could you tell?). At RTE I met with one of Gerry Ryan's producers, a very nice bloke called Tom, and he brought me off to get ready, offering me another coffee, which I gladly accepted just to be sure to be sure.

I sat outside in the, eh, control room I guess you'd call it and sipped demurely at my tasty beverage while the researchers and producers answered calls from listeners. It's like where Roz sits in Fraiser. I don't live here, so I'm not really sure what usually goes on on the Gerry Ryan show, but I could hear the researchers say things like..."So what happened to the dog?" and "Did the body fall out?" I wasn't a bit nervous.

Ten minutes later, with the coffee still too hot to drink properly and it about half an hour earlier than I was told I'd be going on, I was shown in to Gerry's booth and introduced to the man himself.

All slagging the man gets aside, I think he was brilliant. Very professional and relaxed and if I was a little bit nervous at first, I wasn't after a couple of minutes. Fair play to him. So on we blabbed about Superchicks and Yer Mot's a Dog and taking your shoes off before you go into a house and all manner of other stuff. I didn't even notice the time passing until a certain Mayo young wan named

Sheila Clarke made a guest appearance, ya feckin WAGON Sheila!! Ah no seriously, maith thu. I thought Sheila being on was great and if I came out of it looking all sensitive and Noughties, then that's cool. A bit of a lie, but cool nonetheless!

So then we were just about done and the next thing I'm walking on air back down Nutley Lane and into town, answering my phone to everyone who rang to say well done. Thanks lads!

Updated the schedule below to add a UCC reading next week on Thursday. Until then, see you at Arnott's tomorrow for the live Superchick window! And if you're in Cork and not tired of my dulcid tones yet, I'll be on Risteard Keatings show tonight on Red FM at around 10pm.

Sla/n...

Does My Bum Look Big in This?

This is what you ask yourself when sharing a photographer's lens with a stunning model who's at least 5'10" yet weighs the same as a small water biscuit. Yes, I started the day in Arnott's window being told to put my hand there, hold my head this way and generally stop looking like me if I could help it at all. I couldn't. What began as, "Stephen, could you just move closer to Helen and pretend like you're reading the book to her" invariably, before very long at all, became, "Great. Eh, I'd just like to get one or two of Helen on her own before I finish up". Which ones will they be using? Well, you can find out by looking at tomorrow's Herald, Times, Sun, Star and Irish Examiner, but my money is on the beautiful waif. Yep, five photo shoots in one morning is a lot for any aspiring literary rockstar, but I still managed to stay gracious and charming, even though it was hard work, because I haven't forgotten where I came from.

The shoots were interrupted by a quick dash out to Blackrock to sign a few hundred copies of that tome of unmatched brilliance known as Superchick in the distributor's warehouse. The helicopter was apparently double-booked so we (Adrienne from Mercier and me) took a taxi this time.

Last night I was on Red FM, talking to Vic Barry (fine Cork name) for a wee-ish interview of about ten minutes. That one was a phone interview - way different to the one with Gery Ryan yesterday. Kept waiting for Sheila to come on the line, but she kept a low profile this time. You know what's really weird? Interviews are. You know that the other guy is going to pull the plug at some stage but you don't know when. At any moment he could say "Well, that's all we have time for...", which really keeps you on edge and hardly ever happens in real conversations.

Yesterday evening I got wind of another three radio interviews I've to do with Clare FM, Shannonside Radio and Beat 102. These go out south of a line from about Wexford to Galway - see the schedule above for times/dates. Also getting a review in Foinse this week I think. It's an Irish language weekly.

What else? Well, I'll be heading back to Arnotts at around 7pm tonight to get a final gander at it. If anyone's around and fancies a pint, seeya there! I might even introduce you to my mate and co-model Helen, but you have to promise to behave yourself. Nothing much booked for tomorrow or the weekend (except for one of the radio interviews and loads of pints for me), but I'll be sure and scribble any updates here if they happen. I'll also let you know if it stops raining or becomes warm, but don't hold your breath on that score.

Sla/n...

Me and Ronan...

Yep, life is a rollercoaster. I haven't actually met him yet, but Mr. Keating apparently lives around the corner from where I park my gradually-inflating head most nights out here in Malahide. He's been there. He knows what it's like...

I refer to interviews. I did one on Saturday morning, but it only dawned on me as we were nearing the end of it that the whole thing was being recorded, not going out live - I believe it was actually on air on Sunday evening. They're getting more and more surreal. Obviously I'm new at this, right? I'm sure Ronan and Bono and all have it down pat, but I only twigged halfway through that the show I was being interviewed for an Arts programme. Why is this important? Because the

questions were really hard! I was being asked about relationships and Japanese culture and literature. It's one thing to shite on in a pub about whatever stray thoughts assault your numb mind, but you feel like a bit of a chancer when you're being asked serious questions during an interview and you haven't given them much thought - ever! - up to that very moment.

"And what about dating in Japan? Because we have the idea here that it's a really traditional society. But how does that meld with the younger generation in the advent of the technological age, as regards dating and sex?"

And I'm trying to think of a good answer, but Colman and Kitty Barry Murphy flash across my mind and I don't know what to say that won't result in at least one of the three of us being sued. So I just mumble something about sex and religion in Ireland and the Japanese not having the same hangups as we do. Or did. Eh, y'know like?

Then I'm morto, cos I...

- a) Think I've just used the word 'secularism', and I'm not at all sure I know what it means.
- b) I've probably come across as some smartarse who thinks he has a clue, when anyone who knows me knows different.
- c) I think I've managed to take a dig at Irish society and the church - and probably people from the country - but I can't remember now. And me trying to sell a book.

Keep in mind that five minutes into what I thought was the interview, she told me that she was going to start recording now. Hmm?? It really throws you when something like that happens! I thought I only had to watch for being caught out at the end of an interview. Now I have to worry about both ends!

Or how about...

"And do you feel that Irish men just settle for anything in a relationship when they reach a certain age, just to get to a stage where they've properly settled down?"

And I think they may well do, but I think women are worse culprits when it comes to that stuff (not, I stress, that these are the questions that I tend to ponder on anyway as I brush my teeth of an evening). So I tell her, well, no. Women are the ones who'll take any old gobshite if the pickings are slim. And she says

"Not at all. Women are more romantic and will wait."

"Oh..kay..."

And this was before we were recording. Then she asks me the same thing again after we're recording and I can feel her giving me the hairy eyeball down the phone, like she's saying "Go on, I dare you". So I lie and say, yeah, blokes are pathetic, cos I don't want to upset her and anyway I have a bit of a hangover and I'm all disoriented with the hard questions.

So there you go. That interviews are harder than they look/sound is, I s'pose, my point. Of course, all the DJs I've spoken so far have been brilliant - relaxed and cool and utterly unphased by anything I've said. I guess it's like anything. Practice makes perfect. I wonder if Ronan's free to go over some set pieces with me this evening??

Oh, by the way, I think we've scored an interview on the telly for later in the month. More on that later.

Sla/n...

D'unbelievable...

News is filtering through of the 'Telly Interview' I previously joked about but didn't imagine actually doing. I'm going to be on ID Two on Network 2 on, I think, Monday week (May 2nd-ish). I had a quick gander and it's a show that has the same format as the old Dempsey's Den. There is a studio presenter who talks to people between programs - interesting people, y'know? People with a story and who look good on camera is what they're really after, so I s'pose I'm a bit of a result. They still actually have The Den, but that's finished at around 5pm. Then

on comes ID Two and in between Home and Away and the Simpsons, etc., you get the likes of me sitting on the couch and trying to be nonchalant and cool while still paying special nervous attention to the clenching of the buttocks. I'll actually be in the air when it goes out (I think they're recording the segment next Friday), so I won't get to see it until a tape follows me back to Sydney.

Just finished an interview with Beat 102-103 in Waterford, talking to Kieran McGeary. Nice bloke. You know something, DJ's all seem to be very nice. I wonder what that's all about? I think that was recorded too. In fact from now on, as far as the schedule above is concerned, I don't really know when the interviews are going out. I only know when they're being recorded. Hmm...I s'pose that's not much help to anyone, is it?

Anyway, for the TV interview on Friday next week, I'm told that RTE will send 'a car' for me. How feckin cool is that?? Not 'taxi' or 'your bus fare', but an actual 'car'. I'm thinking, stretch-limo-with-white-leather-interior-mahogany-finish-and-a-minibar. Must be. Will keep you posted.

Off to Cork tomorrow for my first official Reading, in UCC. I did an unofficial one back in Sydney before I flew to Ireland, but this will be to people who don't know me. Anyone know any good come-back lines in case I get heckled? "Shut your hole, you" doesn't really have the suave intellectual vibe that I've been trying to cultivate since I got back.

Then it's Cork City Library at midnight on Friday. Who goes to book readings at midnight on a Friday? Will let you know.

The City of Culture...

Yesterday I did my first radio interview on a mobile. I was in Heuston station, waiting for a train to Cork and hiding at the back of the Easons shop where it was nice and quiet. Until, that is, the interview started and a troupe of ten-year-olds on a school trip immediately tumbled into the shop and decided to have a yelling competition. That was a bit stressful. I was in the greeting cards section, surrounded by happy thoughts like "You're the Best Mum" and "I Love You" and "Happy Birthday to a Special Sister" but I have to say the sentiments

weren't really rubbing off on me with all those noisy little bastards chasing each other around the shop, doing tyre screeches as they cornered the shelves and everything.

Anyway, the train was due into Cork at 13:40 and you can imagine my surprise when I glanced at my watch as I stepped onto the platform and noticed that it read precisely 13:40. I know I've been out of Ireland for a long time, but this was still pretty impressive!

Even more impressive is Cork.

Now, any Cork man I've ever met is rabid about how brilliant Cork is. Cork, cork, feckin Cork is all you get out of most of them and if they're not being thankful because they're from Cork, they're being sorry for me because I'm from Dublin. Anyway, for whatever reason, I've never been here before and I'm dead impressed. I don't know if it's just been done up cos of the European City of Culture thing or if it's always been like this, but there's a great buzz about the city. And it's smaller than Dublin. And it seems cleaner and, frankly, a bit genuinely cooler whereas Dublin these days thinks the Temple Bar (all twenty-five metres of it) is bloody Greenwich Village or something. Christ, I'll never live this down, will I? Still, I'm being honest. I always thought Galway was a cool place to go, but from now on I'll be trying to squeeze Cork into any trips home if I can. The pubs last night were hopping and the Murphy's was absolutely gorgeous. I'm even going to try the Beamish tonight and intend buying a floppy cloth cap to enhance the experience.

Also, I got to see where my Grandmother grew up. For at least five generations my mother's mother's family lived at the top of Patrick's Hill. I remember Nanny going on about that hill. She'd be up and down it at least a dozen times a day when she was a child; a bucket of milk in one hand, a hen in the other and the family donkey slung across her back to save it the climb. It's not often you can say with conviction that you know exactly where your granny was and what she was doing on a particular evening over eighty years ago, but yesterday I stood outside her house and looked back down the hill at the city and knew that on Dec 11th 1920, Nanny was a frightened kid standing in the same place and looking down at the same city being burned by the Black and Tans. Quite a feeling. Turning away from the city, the view is spectacular and I noticed that some of

the tiny old cottages had For Sale signs in the window. Hmm...

And she wasn't bulshitting about the hill either. It was like climbing a ladder!

Anyway, then it was off to UCC, which also took me by surprise by being spectacular. Lovely grounds and old buildings. A bit like Trinity in Dublin, I s'pose, but it didn't have the same wanky vibe to it.

My Big Reading turned out to be a rather intimate affair. Actually, that's what a book reading should be, I think, and I really enjoyed it. A few old friends were there (although I made an arsehole of myself by not recognising Adrian - doh!) and the 'crowd' came to about twenty. There was a poker game going on at the far end of the bar and a few couples out having a scoop. It was exam time, I believe, so the campus was quiet anyway. I'd do more of them no problem. It's not exactly a Yer Mot's a Dog gig or an audience with Billy Connolly or anything, but there was something really fun about reading from Superchick to an audience. I'll have a think about it and try to figure out why, but in the meantime I'm looking forward to tonight in the City Library.

So there you have it. Yesterday was beautiful in Cork. Today it's pissing down buckets of course - hence the long blog entry!

Last thing: A quick note to people from Cork that I know...

Okay, okay, you can shut up now. The whole Cork thing - I get it!

Old People and Clergy...

What are the chances, hoh? I scan the room from my vantage point at the back of Cork City Library, and there in front of me are more blue rinses than you'd see at a Harpic product launch. Oh, and the odd nun's habit just for good measure. They're sitting there, rapt, as a couple of actors perform a scene from Macbeth where Lady Macbeth and, eh, Mr. Macbeth are having what you could only describe as a fairly serious chin wag. I'm up next and my palms are sweaty. A quick scan of the book and, no, it hasn't suddenly happened that there's a huge swathe of text in Superchick that I can confidently read from to an audience like this. I'd done the 'standing in the bath' scene the previous night in UCC, but could

only chuckle to myself at the idea of introducing Aesop to Sr. Murphy and her Octogenarian Society mates like this. I did preface my reading with the point that Shakespeare was no stranger to a bit of the bawdy and the ribald, but I think that only put them on high alert. Fair enough, at no point in my studies of Hamlet or the Merchant of Venice do I recall Rosencrantz or Antonio or anyone else tell another character to kiss his hairy beanbag. It was suddenly quite hot in Cork and me with no handkerchief to dab at my glowing brow.

Of course, it all went well anyway. The clergy seemed to disappear before I started to speak (maybe they got a quiet whisper from God telling them to call it a night). I also had some mates in the audience who led the giggles and about forty minutes after I started I was done and heading gratefully to the pub, my official engagements in Cork at an end.

Earlier in the evening I'd gotten a call from Society and Personal magazine, who wanted to interview me. Apparently this is a 'society' mag, but I only found that out later. Anyway, I spoke to the reporter in a pub for over an hour about pretty much everything. She might as well have been researching for a This is Your Life program! It was only afterwards that I found out she was doing a 1000 word article. She had enough material for a mini series! The point I'm making, I think, is that I learned something interesting. How an interviewee comes across in a written article is very much up to the reporter. Even though you think you're saying what you want to say, it's up to the reporters to put in or leave out what they want. In that sense you really are at the mercy of the other guy. Not a huge problem for me, obviously, but you can see how anyone from Jacko to Bono to Paris Hilton to Bertie can be made to look or sound anything from a god to a complete arsehole through judicious use of the editing skills of the reporter or the slant of the publication he's writing for. Or, to put it another way, don't believe everything you read. Anyway, I think the article comes out in the June issue, so hopefully they'll be gentle with me.

I've got brilliant mates, and some of them drove from as far away as Mayo, Cavan, Tipp and all around Cork to say hello and give me a bit of support when I was doing my thing. Thanks guys - yur d best! It also meant I had some drinking buddies and so I stayed an extra night to sample the delights on offer. Tried the Beamish (good, but you wouldn't drink a van load), the Murphys (very very good) and the Guinness (hmm...Guinness) but by the end of Saturday night I was talking

confidently but no doubt erroneously about rugby in the southern hemisphere to Sheila's brother Mick. As such, it was probably a good thing that the city shuts down at 2am and we were ejected onto the street before I embarrassed myself.

Quick note: Shite-talking about rugby aside, I think it's stupid that there's effectively a 2am curfew. Five past two and every reveller in Cork is out looking for a taxi home. I didn't see any trouble or anything, but everyone was having a great time (we were in a really cool bar called, I think, Bailey's) and then just got turfed out. For God's sake, why?? I haven't done much bitching about Ireland since I got back, but this is one area that sucks. I like to decide on my own when bedtime is and am allowed to do so in Tokyo, Sydney, etc. If I'm in a state the next day cos it was bright when I got home, well then that's my problem. Moan, whinge, grumble.

So there you go - I'm effectively into my 'extra' week. There'll probably be more interviews to do, and of course I've got the tv spot to do later in the week, but the end of my book tour (let me just say that one more time while I still can...MY BOOK TOUR!!) is in sight now. What a feckin buzz, that's all I can say!

Met up with some old mates back in Dublin after pulling in to Heuston and found myself in McDaid's for what was supposed to be a quick couple, but ended up being a good bit more than that. Then Bruxelles for a Blues session that was absolutely brilliant. There's a bit of life in Dublin yet!!!!

Oh, sales figures are starting to come in. Don't have exact numbers just yet, but sales are in the thousands and I'm now officially in the Top 100 in the country however these things are measured (it's not actually that simple apparently). Will keep you posted on all that and anything else that's going on of course.

Now...off to the gym. I've been a bit bold over the past few weeks and don't feel quite as chipper and svelte as I did getting off the plane!

No Really, Life Imitates Art...

In the maddest thing that has happened to date, five minutes ago I found myself being interviewed (as gaeilge) by a bloke from TG4 to make sure I could talk in our beautiful national tongue without mentioning things that ran as fast as the

wind or were as sweet as honey. Well, I guess I passed the test cos, yes, they're sending a car for me on Saturday!! RTE might as well give me a feckin car at this stage!

Anyway, I'm rushing now (heading out to play golf doncha know), but just thought I'd stick a quickie up here while I'm all excited. The show is called "Arda/n" and it's going out on Saturday night at, I think, 10pm.

So anyway, besides golf, I guess I'll be spending the next four days practising my Irish and shopping for durable underwear. Brilliant!!

Feckin go iontach...

Just thought I'd expand a little on yesterday's somewhat breathless announcement that I've got two TV interviews coming up this weekend. Apparently, I've to be in Donnybrook tomorrow evening at 5pm for 'hair and make-up', and if that doesn't remind you of anything then you're definitely reading the wrong books. At this stage I'm just waiting for Ruth to be arrested on me and then I'll know I've actually crossed over into the twilight zone where the borders between fact and fiction are blurred and I'm a good-looking guitarist in a Dublin rock band (which would actually be kind of cool).

Saturday night I get to strut my stuff as Gaeilge, which isn't a bit worrying as you can imagine. I've been interviewing myself in Irish all morning, trying out sentence constructions, checking my vocab and generally causing mothers to pull their children closer as they perambulate past on the street, giving me the frosty head. It's not so much the talking that has them wary, I think, as the back and forth banter I'm trying to get right. I tend to turn my head from side to side for added authenticity and it'll be this, as much as anything, that'll bring me to the attention of the authorities if I don't watch myself, or at least practise behind closed doors.

Oh, and I think I've got a chest infection. Haven't been sick for two years, but two weeks in Ireland and here I am with phlegm issues. And me about to go on the telly.

"You're very welcome, Stephen."

"Thank you very much, Paddy. Cough cough. Oh, here, let me wipe that up for you."

Anyway, I've been sucking down the oranges and the Vitamin C tablets, so at least I've got diarrhoea to look forward to if it doesn't clear up by tomorrow.

So there you have it. I'm told I'll be done at around 7:30pm tomorrow, so then I'm going to head back into town and have a couple of scoops in McDaid's for about 8:30pm I s'pose. If anyone reading this will be in town, please drop in and say hello! I'll send out some emails too. Will be doing family stuff on Sunday, so mightn't get to go out again before I head off on Monday.

That's about it! I'll hopefully get a chance to add more here over the next few days and tell you what being on the telly is like (if I'm not carted off to an oxygen tent beforehand with this feckin cold), but in the meantime, I hope to see you all in tv-land on Saturday night and Monday evening - if not in McDaid's tomorrow.

My Fifteen Minutes...

Rushing to the airport now.

I'll update the blog properly from Australia when I get back (LOTS to add), but in the meantime I just wanted to say thanks to everyone for the emails and the calls and the support and the company for pints. Really, what a completely brilliant trip in every sense of the word!

But...it's been nearly a month now and it's time to get back to something approaching normality. At least until the movie rights get sold and then I can do this type of thing full time. Now that would be feckin cool. I could get used to being a literary rock star and I don't care who knows it!

Anyway, sin a bhfuil. Go raibh mile. More in a few days.

Rewind...

Back in Sydney now. The sun is beaming and the sea is sparkling and it feels like about 10,000 miles away from Dublin. Funny that.

Anyway, I'm a bit behind in my blatherings, so I thought I'd go back to last Friday evening - the day I made my televisual debut, starring alongside a two-piece acoustic band and a pair of guide dog pups (or 'guide dogs in training' as they apparently, seriously and rather strangely prefer to be called).

First of all, my excitement over 'the car' was short-lived. I was in town on Friday, rapidly running out of time in the pressie-buying department, and so told them not to send the car out to Malahide. I'd make my own way to Donnybrook. Sure didn't I know the way and everything, having been out there for my Gerry Ryan slot (which seems like years ago!) just a couple of weeks ago.

Well, I got there with loads of time to spare and was all prepared for whatever rockstar treatment I had coming to me. I should probably point out that I'd never seen the show on which I was to be appearing and I'd no idea how long I'd be on for or anything like that. So anyway there I am, all set for some hand pumping and hors d'oeuvre munching, blissfully unaware that the Hobnailed Boot of Damocles was moving rapidly towards the groin of my, eh, happiness.

I first began to suspect that maybe I wouldn't be getting the red carpet treatment when the girl who met me (Aideen) told me to follow her up the 'holding area' - not the 'dressing room' or the 'bar' - and to help myself to the 'vending machine'. So up I go and there are the band (who I think are called Long Lost Brother) and their manager at one table and a group of about four people with the dogs at (and under) another.

Figuring that I should get chatting so as to be all bubbly and outgoing when my slot came, I introduced myself to the band and sat down at their table and started blabbering away. Nice lads and I'm sure they went down a treat when Aideen came and took them away from me down to the studio. I looked around and decided I was on a roll so I might as well get friendly with the dog people and their charges.

Now, I'm a sucker for a nice doggy and they were only feckin gorgeous. A tiny baby German Shepherd and a slightly older Labrador/Golden Retriever mix, both with little luminous "Guide Dog Pup" jackets on them. I could easily make friends with dogs like that and their owners.

"So, they're guide dog pups then," I said to one of them, big happy grin on me.

"Actually no. They're not," she answered. "We prefer guide dog in training." She seemed to include the dogs in that sentiment with a sweep of her arm. The others at the table nodded pointedly at me like just I'd committed the equivalent, in the canine etiquette world, of leaning over to let one out at the dinner table.

"But...," I said, pointing at the jackets.

"We're getting new jackets."

"I see."

And that was that. Aideen came and took them away before I had a chance to display any further ignorance of the ways of the world and then I was on my own to reflect that, irrespective of their little foibles, dogs are brilliant and cats are wankers and can you just imagine being blind and having a guide cat.

By the by, along comes Aideen again and off I head to 'Hair and Make-Up', thinking that this is more like it. It wasn't really. The merest dab of powder on my face and I'm done. I was kind of hoping she'd give me a brand new do - y'know, something to reflect my new status as urban artist and man-about-trendyville - but she just looked at me in the mirror and said "Sure that'll do grand. Off you go." I tried to console myself that this must have something to do with perfect bone structure and naturally wavy locks as I made my way underground to the studio behind Aideen who, incidentally, was lovely and very good at putting people at ease. I s'pose this is part of her job.

I'm shown into the studio, which actually reminded me of Gerry Ryan's one. There was one room for the crew, who were in charge of operating all the buttons, and another room which was the one for me and the presenter. The TV cameras and all are already set up and fixed and operated from the control room, so there wasn't even anyone behind them. I sat on the couch in the TV room and looked around as I waited for the presenter to come back. She was in 'wardrobe' cos we were recording the show for Monday and she couldn't be wearing her Friday

clothes. The show is usually live, but since Monday was a bank holiday they were recording it. Hence the first words out of my gob, ever, on television were a bold-faced lie.

"3-2-1..." said the producer.

"Here we are with Stephen J Martin, author of the novel Superchick," said the presenter. "Did you enjoy your bank holiday weekend Stephen?"

And it only Friday.

"I did," I said. "I had a fabulous weekend."

Now. Let that be another lesson to you. Don't believe everything you see on the telly.

So anyway, the whole thing lasted about five minutes and I can't even remember what I talked about cos it was all very fast and I was in the air when it actually went out on Monday and so I didn't see it. Not too long at all after getting started I was out the door and looking for a bus into town, feeling a little bit less than fully satisfied with the experience. It was time for a decent scoop and into McDaid's I headed to meet up with some old friends, which was brilliant of course. A late night ensued and it was feeling decidedly ropey that I made a start to Saturday.

So was that it? Is telly shite? Well, I have to be honest...it was cool to be doing it but there was little or no glamour, which is kind of what I had imagined (hoped!). Everyone, of course, was very relaxed and professional but it was all very business-like and if there is a sexy side to it, it's not at 7pm on the Friday before a bank holiday weekend when everyone just wants to do the job and get home. Fairly understandable.

But - aha! - it turns out that there is a sexy side to it, but that'll have to wait for another entry. I'll just say that, unlikely and surprising as it may seem considering what was in my inbox for Saturday, one of the coolest things I ever did in my life I was about to do. Really. You want sexy? I've got three alphanumeric characters for you...TG4.

Ta poll i mo bhrístí...

I'd been watching a bit of TG4 in the run-up to my appearing on Ardán and it seems to me that they're getting it right. Anyone who knows me will probably know that I can speak Irish a bit and think - although I'm not one to get into a row over this unless provoked! - Irish people should all be able to speak it. By the time you get to your last year in primary school, there it is; you should be fluent. Peig and Scothscéalta and all that is a different debate entirely, but the ability to converse in Irish is, I think, something we should all have from a pretty early age. Whether you use it or not afterwards is up to you.

Anyway, the biggest problem was always that it was dead boring in school. It looks like TG4 is dealing with that problem head on with some pretty trendy and funny programming, not to mention some great sports coverage. So I wasn't completely shitting myself, I s'pose is what I'm saying, as I sat in the 'car' on the way to Donnybrook on Saturday afternoon - I didn't expect it to be all formal and serious and slaps on the wrist for wrong pronunciation in the genitive case, etc.

Incidentally, my 'car' turned out to be a taxi. But it was a nice big one and the driver gave me a handful of sucky sweets in case my mouth dried up later on in the studio, which I thought was very nice of him.

So I get there anyway, and a pretty red-haired girl with freckles was getting out of a taxi right in front of me. She was carrying a fiddle in a case and I thought that she was just about the Irish-est looking thing I'd seen in my three and a half weeks. Turns out that she was also going to be on Ardán and her name was Bernadette. She used to be one of the musicians on the Lord of the Dance show and was now a Rose, as in of Tralee. Wasn't feckin slumming it any more, was I?? She was absolutely lovely and dead relaxed about being on the telly, so I tried to play it cool and nonchalant but I doubt if I fooled anyone. I was pretty sure I could say whatever I wanted to say, albeit in baby Irish if it came to that, but I was getting worried that the presenter would ask me something and I'd miss it completely and end up doing an Aesop on it.

So then the floor manager came out to Bernadette and myself and invited us on through to what she called - and the word will forever after have happy

associations for me - 'hospitality'. It's my new favourite word when used in the context she meant it, which is essentially 'where we keep the beer and vol au vents'.

Bernadette took a detour to wardrobe (it's a bit high maintenance being a Rose I'd say) and I was led through a door to find myself staring at a full bar and nosh spread in a well-appointed room of leather and velvet sofas, teak coffee tables and smiling wait people. I was first there.

"Can I help you sir?"

"You certainly can," I said, reversing my bum into an armchair that felt like it was waiting all its life to receive it. "I'll have a pint of Guinness."

Now THIS is being on the telly.

The previous day Rossa, one of the producers, had asked me on the phone who I'd be bringing with me to the studio. I didn't know I was to bring anyone, but he assured me that I could, nay should!, bring some mates. I'd mentioned it to some people the previous night in McDaid's and got four takers. Eddie, Niall, Mairéad and Colm all arrived within ten minutes of me and were soon joining me with bevies of their own, Eddie in particular eyeing up the smoked salmon and cream cheese crackers.

Next thing I'm filling out a kind of disclaimer form, as I had done the previous day for Network 2. I hand it back and the girl told me to fill in the other side. I turned it over.

"It's for your bank details."

"Huh?" I said, an old pro.

"That's how we pay you."

"Huh?"

"You don't want to be paid?"

This is all going on in Irish, and she's probably wondering if there's been some terrible mistake.

"I get paid?"

"Yeah, unless you'd rather not."

"No, no. That's okay."

I fill out the form, marvelling at how much I feel I should be paying them instead. And how much do I get? A-ha ... not telling.

Soon we had Bernadette back and then the other guests and their mates and the presenter and the cameramen and the crew and make-up people and producers and everyone, basically, connected with the show. What we had, really, was a party - and a tres cool one at that. It was still over an hour before the show was going out (which was live at 10pm) and the result of all this chatting and drinking and making friends was that no one was nervous when, shortly before ten, the floor manager announced that we'd all have to be getting on out to the studio. Up we all get and into Studio 5 with us, taking up our positions and chatting away as if we were all old mates at a do and were just moving from the kitchen to the lounge cos the football was about to start. Very on the ball from TG4 - what a brilliant way to make people feel welcome and put them at ease.

I'd already been sorted by Make-Up. Didn't take long, although longer than the Network 2 job I'd had done the previous day. I got powder on the backs of my hands too this time, which kind of took me by surprise and had me wondering briefly if there was something wrong with them. Too hairy? Not hairy enough? I mean, you don't really check out the backs of your hands when you're getting ready to go out of a Saturday night or anything, do you? What were they looking for that they decided I needed a quick dab before they could let me on the telly with them? Whatever it was I didn't get a chance to ask because I noticed that one of the other guests was getting her face done behind me. The poor girl had come straight from the Kinsale Sevens rugby tournament that day, where someone had boxed the head off her in a ruck. She had a shiner you could have abseiled down and there was a team of make-up people trying to do a job on it.

Under the circumstances I didn't feel like Steve wasn't getting enough attention, the head on her, and so I just went back down to the lads for one last glass of the very playful grenache before we got started.

Bernadette was on first and I was behind the scenes (and a thick black curtain) watching her on a small monitor with some of the crew. Her Irish seemed to be brilliant, although it was hard to hear her with the heart now thumping in me and the blood rushing through my head like it was looking for the way out. I was on next.

Big clap for Bernadette and then I'm walking out into the lights and sitting on the couch beside Páidí, the very cool and very nice presenter. I think the interview lasted about seven or eight minutes, but if I hadn't seen a video of it the next day I wouldn't be able to tell you what we talked about. All I can say is that it was like the first time on a rollercoaster or the first big YMAD gig or the first time a Formula One car sped past me or I heard a crowd of fifty thousand people roar when Ireland scored. Just an incredible buzz. After a little while I pretty much knew that Páidí wasn't going to say anything I couldn't handle (maith thú Páidí!) and then it was all plain sailing. Then it's over and we cut to a break and I get a massive cheer from the lads. By the time the ads are over I'm sitting in the audience with my mates, drinking a big fat glass of wine and feeling like a million quid.

And the really, really weird thing was - the whole evening happened almost exactly like I wrote in Superchick! It was uncanny. Even Páidí and Rossa were laughing at how true to life that bit of the book was.

After the show we all headed back to 'hospitality' (bless it) and partied on for another couple of hours. The coolest thing ever. All my new mates chatting in Irish or English, depending on who was there (not everyone had Irish by any means), lots of well-wishing and joking, everyone just having a really good evening. Then I had to head into town to meet some people and off I went, taxi voucher in my pocket courtesy of TG4. I know I'm harping on it now, but TG4 are the absolute dog's bollocks and my new favourite TV station in the world.

Brilliant.