

Goran Vojnović

SOUTHERN SCUM GO HOME!

to all my kith and kin

Who is scum? Scum is a person who lives in the territory of a certain country, but does not belong to the ethnic majority there. In our case this refers to those who come from any place south or east of the river Kolpa. In most cases their descendents are also considered scum. In their physiognomy they differ from the majority population with their low forehead, thick joined-up eyebrows, high cheekbones and a strong lower jaw. Their main behavioural characteristics are: they love an easy life, they swear, they like alcohol, women and football. They adore kitsch and gold jewellery. They are into martial arts and are frequently aggressive without any real reason. In most cases their period of acclimatisation is a lengthy one.

from the song Čefur by Robert Pešut Magnifico*

** the word Čefur in the original is a derogatory term used in Slovenia*

Čefur – an immigrant from the southern republics of the former Yugoslavia (20th century), also in written form čifur, čufur, čefurka, čifurka, čufurka, čefurski, čifurski, čufurski, all derogatory. Probably from Croatian or Serbian Čift, Čivut meaning ‘Jew’, in most uses in these languages a derogatory description of a member of the Jewish nation. In Slovene the ending –ur, rather than the original –ut, has been adopted in line with other derogatory terms such as nemčur (instead of nemec) – derogatory for a person of German origin.

Marko Snoj, Slovene Etymological Dictionary

Southern scum go home!

a popular graffiti slogan on the streets of Ljubljana (orig. Čefurji raus!)

ON WHY I HAVEN'T GOT A TEAM

I haven't got my own team! This is really what bugs me most! If I lived in Belgrade, I would support Red Star and be a true fan. A Delija throughout my life! If I lived in Sarajevo I'd have been a Maniac, a FC Željezničar fan. But all that is real fucked up here. You can't support Olimpija if, like me, you play for our local club Slovan. You can't just say you're a Slovan fan, that just sounds crap. It's fuck all of a club. What does playing for them make me? A Red Tiger? What the fuck! Slovan footballers play in the third league and their grounds have a standing capacity of one thousand. But Olimpija is a club for mummy's and daddy's spoilt brats. Only up town fags play there. It is not that I don't support Olimpija, but no money in the world would persuade me to become a Green Dragon. I don't know why! It's just not right! Fuck it! Maybe the real problem is that I'm southern scum. But it is also because I'm scum that it really bugs me that I haven't got a team. It's in my blood. This need for a team for which I could get into a fight with anyone who dared say any shit about it.

I think my Slovene schoolmates don't really care that they haven't got a team. They don't give a shit. But me ... this really gets to me, so much so that I think I really need to beat someone up just to get it off my chest. There is no sodding tradition here. If you're born in Barcelona, your parents buy you a Ronaldinho kit, a club season ticket and take you to Camp Nou every Sunday to watch the match with Real. After that you go to matches all your life. When you get married you take your wife along, then your kids, your grandchildren and so on. And Barça is the law! If anyone just mentions Real or Ronaldo, they've had it! No questions. Get him! If you come to school in an Eto'o kit you're in. If you wear Raul you're fucked. Not like here where you can come into school with an Olimpija shirt with Cimirotič written all over it and still be cool. Or you can walk through the main square in Ljubljana wearing a rival Maribor kit and no one will kick your head in.

My old man, Radovan Đorđić, is a Red Star fan. I was too, when I was a kid and watched all of Radovan's taped old matches from when they were world champions over and over again. Stojanović, Radinović, Najdovski, Šabanađović, Belodedić, Jugović, Prosinečki, Savičević, Binić, Mihajlović, Pančev. I watched them play Milan, when it was one nil to Red Star and the match was stopped due to fog. In the repeat match they were out on penalties. I watched them play Cologne, when the goalie Stojanović was injured and the reserve Milojević let in three goals in the second half. Then they finally shook off this run of bad luck and went through the lot to win the European championship. Ranka, my mum, told me that it was crazy at our flat during the championship, full of people. The old man's mates, ageing scum. All supported Red

Star of course. Everybody watched the match peacefully with just the occasional smart arse commenting on this or that. Then you'd suddenly get a: "Comeooooooooon! Shit no! Selfish motherfucker! Fuck you, you idiotic twat! What a loser! Unbefuckinlievable!" And then they all sank back into contemplative mode until the next opportunity for Red Star. The old man is actually Bosnian, but a Serb and has been a Red Star fan since birth, even travelling to matches in Belgrade and Sarajevo to support the team. I can't be a Delija. Don't know why not. It's all complicated to fuck's degree. OK, I support Red Star, but can't say it is my team ... no way ... no point in that is there? That's for folk from Belgrade. If you are cool, you support your local team. But Ljubljana is a strange town.

It might be because I'm southern scum. If I was Slovene, I'd sit at home and support Olimpija. I'd probably also go to ice-hockey matches. My father Janez would sit with me and calmly explain how Olimpija were national basketball champions in the 1970's and how, in the 80's, they once drew with Red Star who were World Champions and how they then played with Milan in a match that was Marco van Basten's last game with the team and Olimpija lost 3:0 only. That's it. If you once supported a team that were world champions, then you can't just switch and get excited about draws, honourable defeats, Champions League pre-qualifiers, the Slovenian Cup or the high score against FC Fuckin'Nowhere. Fuck it, you just can't. OK, I supported the Olimpija basketball team when they were in the Final Four in Rome and when they were totally dismantling Panathinaikos with Dominique Wilkins and Kinder with Predrag Danilović ... but when they started losing with minor local teams that was too much to take. This inborn tradition just doesn't exist here. It's the southern scum in me. Either you're the best in the world or you, as Radovan would say, 'just go off and sharpen some pencils'.

My mates support Red Star. Dejan supports them. And Aco too. But their parents are Serbs. From Serbia. We Bosnians see things differently. Radovan can't stand these chetniks, Serbian nationalists such as Arkan, or his wife, the popular singer Ceca, or the basketball player Gurović with his tattoo of the chetnik leader Draža Mihajlović, or the fact that Red Star has become a team that now has to play in Champions League qualifiers, just like Olimpija. They're shit. Dejan wears his red scarf and goes off to Red Star matches with the Fins, Hungarians, Estonians and other such wankers. Aco hits for Croats, but I only watch matches with Germany. This I got from one of my old man's mates, who changed allegiance from Dinamo Zagreb to Red Star and then kept explaining how very different the teams are and how the people in them are quite the opposites. Before the Champions League draw, those in Zagreb awkwardly ponder: "You know guys, it would really be great if we don't get the Germans in the first round. That means we can get through to the second round ... just as long as we don't get the Germans."

At the same time at Red Star they boast: “Hope it’s the Germans. We’ll fuck the Krauts and their mothers just like in forty-five. We’ll score at least five against ‘em!” It’s not that the Germans don’t totally walk over them in the end anyway, but your chances are better if you start the match with balls. That is what I bet on. You can’t really give a shit about a game where all you can expect is an honourable defeat. That’s not the mentality. That is why Aco, Dejan and me, and we sometimes drag Adi along too, get together and support the Yugo team. We have our God. That’s the basketball player Dejan Bodiroga! In basketball we all support the same team. I can’t be bothered with other shit such as volleyball or water polo. Footie and basketball. The occasional handball perhaps. All the rest is complete crap.

Fužine should have its own footie club. That’d be something! There are twenty thousand of us. Thirty thousand if you count all the illegals. And that’s not including the junkies. FC Fužine. That’s the real point innit? Either you support a big club that plays for the world championship title, or a small, local, neighbourhood, marginal team that loses all its games and it’s all great fun when a hundred or so gather at each game and do someone in when they all get pissed afterwards. Ljubljana is sort of in between a town and a village and its teams are sort of in between good ones and zilch. FC Fužine would be the solution. One could get into that. Fužine ... neat!

For a while it looked like we might even get a club. Every Sunday the older guys set up their goal posts on the local playground and played. On the perimeters pensioners played chess, someone brought a boot full of beer and the stands were full of kids and older scum with the excuse that they cannot play ball cos they have a knee injury or some shit like that. The other point; not a woman in sight and not a word of Slovene heard. Only Matej the postman played, so everyone called him *Slovenac* as he was the only one that wasn’t southern scum. Similarly the caretaker Vlado was called Tuđman after the president of Croatia. Just because he was from Slavonski Brod. No one gave a shit he wasn’t even a Croat. Smajlagić was called Janša after the Slovenian PM, cos he once, long before Janša went into politics, joined a demonstration to let him out of the slammer. And so they played. It was great fun. We’d go along to watch and laugh at our old men. It was hilarious listening to those who had learnt some Slovene, forgotten some scum and spoke a sort of mishmash mixture of the two. Fužine language. You’d get stuff like: “Pass me z ballu! I’ve do my ankle bad! My back it is twitchy hurt!” And on top of this all the racist insults that showered in bursts of laughter from these caretakers, plumbers, drivers, conductors, builders and all the other scum from Fužine, all of them full of socio-political connotations of what was once common territory: “Shoot you Slovene bastard! You clumsy

Ustasha idiot! Are you Bosnians stupid or just dumb? I am here alone by the goal, but you can't fuckin' see me!"

Then it all fell through. Even the geriatrics don't play chess any more. FC Fužine is no longer an option. FC Olimpija also fell apart and is no more. It's all crazy. Can you imagine Barça falling apart? Or Bayern? Or Liverpool? People would go out into the streets. There would be demonstrations. Parliaments would be stormed. All responsible would be hung by their balls. Not here. The largest football club in the country dissolves and no one gives a damn. If the National Philharmonic was closed, artists would go on and on about tradition and culture and all that. But if you fuck up a team against which Marco van Basten played his last game, it doesn't matter. They're only sportsmen anyway. Dumb, uneducated, uncultured. Only southern scum play footie anyway. They all have short wonky legs. This is the fucking mentality. No respect. How can one get enthusiastic about something everyone else despises? And then they go on about assimilation. This takes time. Workers come from ex-Yugo and you want them to learn about your poets and writers. What else? As if they gave a toss about any of their own poets back home. I want to be into a team. But I can't. Simple as that. And so part of my Slovenian identity is under pressure. As is my scum identity. How am I supposed to assimilate and sort of feel Slovene if I ain't even got a team. Just not possible. And this kinda bugs me.

ON WHY WE GOT INTO A FIGHT AFTER THE END OF THE FINAL

No fuck in the whole world can really compare to a buzzerbeater in the final. OK, perhaps a fuck with Angelina Jolie. But for sure Brad Pitt can't remember every fuck with Angelina, while Michael Jordan certainly remembers all his buzzerbeaters in the NBA finals. Fuck it, that's a simple fact. I must tell all of you who were banging away at the moment I scored against Olimpija in the last second of the National Championships, even if you were pumping J.Lo with her fat arse, that at that moment I was The Daddy. The Best! And there is no way I would exchange that feeling for a threesome with sexy singers Severina and Ceca. Well, perhaps for them I might, but not for any other threesome in the whole world. I'm not kidding. A buzzerbeater is better than a fuck and that's that!

I was nervous like hell. More than ever in my entire life. It was 'unbelibavle', as my *komšija* Senad would say. I was real worked up throughout the game, cos these cock-arse brats from Olimpija really get on my nerves whenever I see them, so much so that I just want to puke. With their new Air Jordans at every match. You always get those players on the court whose

parents are in the stands and push free ski passes to the coach, or their companies sponsor the team and they are board members. I'm not saying Slovan is a cool team. But Olimpija is real shit! I mean real shit! Instead of a coach they've got this fat pig, blown up like a balloon! No wonder you're a nervous wreck when you play against them. Your hands sweat and you feel shaky. And the referees keep blowing the whistle in their favour, so you really want to start head butting all of them, thieving cunts! Then there's our coach, a total idiot with a voice you can't possibly hear in a full arena, so all you see is his idiotic grimace from the perimeter, as if it might explode. You know exactly what he's shouting and would really like to tell him where to stick it. He hasn't got a clue and talks total bullshit. On top of all this I get Radovan attending the game, shouting nonstop from the stands, despite knowing bugger all about basketball as he only ever played footie. But he thinks he knows everything and I can hear him screaming during the game: "Marko! Maaarkoooo! Go get the ball! Watch their forward! Centre the ball!", and other such bollocks. And you get those pathetic Olimpija fans shouting: "He ain't got it! No way - he'll miss! He fucked up!", especially when their daddies begin letting out their typical Slovene warnings: "Sebastiaaaaan, do not allow him to outplay you with a crossover dribble!". Crossover dribble my cock across his stupid face! Then you get the ball, you rush towards the basket and shoot the ball somewhere. Anywhere, fuck knows where!

And the ball falls into the basket. You don't even know how yourself. It's all a blur anyway, but you have won. And that's that, fuck it! And you see the perplexed expression on the face of the girlfriend of this Sebastian bloke, the guy who tried to block you, but you outplayed him with a crossover dribble as you showed him the finger and screamed into his ear how you'll pull your pants down and show him how he can go fuck himself. We're the best! We're the best! All the tension disappears, adrenalin starts pumping and you become an animal, or 'aminal', as my *komšija* Senad would say! You let out a beastly roar and hit into something with all your strength. Anything that happens to be in front of you and if you're lucky it isn't a concrete wall cos you'd probably injure yourself. You run up and down the court shouting until your vocal chords start to fail you. We are the best, the best! You hug and embrace your totally sweaty teammates, hit each other on the shoulders, jump up and down, throw yourself on the floor, jump up again and release all the crazy energy. We're the best! We're the best!

That is actually a Red Star fan chant. Our team started using it after a match in the Pionir Arena in Belgrade when a fan ran out onto the court towards the end of a match in which Red Star were losing, and started jerking off in front of the best player of the Italian team, some black dude, with all the fans shouting: "We're the best! We're the best! We're trash! We're trash!" This scum primitivism, fucked up, vulgar, repulsive and sick, Balkan morbid narcissism

is, in a strange way, always really cool when something as raw and animalistic as this is happening to you or when you are totally wasted. This is something in our genes, at least in us scum. So you shout “We’re the best! We’re the best! We’re trash! We’re trash!” And everyone else in the locker rooms joins in, even the Slovenes. They towel snap each other on their naked butts, jump around, pull faces. When those white and green wankers went past I shouted into somebody’s face “We’re the best! We’re the best! We’re trash! We’re trash!” All he did was push me aside, but that was enough to start it off. It was the best punch up of my life. We kicked their asses real good. Smashed up their pony ass faces!

ON WHY, THANKS TO RADOVAN, WE ENDED OUR CELEBRATIONS IN A MEAT WAGON

The cops came thanks to Radovan. I am sure of that. It was bound to happen and I knew it would before I went out, plus the fact that Rile and Krstić came round. I imagine they were playing classic popular Serbian singers like Miroslav Ilić or Šaban Šaulić at full volume, or some other golden oldie that Radovan has the original tapes of. He gets them out every time he is hammered. Then they wail along: *‘Come and we’ll grow old together!’* We even toasted before I left, me with lime cordial and them with some really fierce *rakija* that he had brought from Bosnia years ago and was saving for a special occasion. Of course for him it’s a special occasion every time he gets hammered. It is not that he does it often, but when he’s pissed he’s a real mess. I can just see him, waddling down the corridor to speak to the cops. He probably took the trophy with him and started to explain how his son Marko won and how they are celebrating a little and were a little merry, cos our Marko scored, like, in the last second of the match and got a trophy for the best shot of the tournament. Then he promised them that they would turn the music down and go to bed, so they left. He then shouted back down the corridor to turn it back up and kept banging on the door of that fat Maršič woman, yelling that it’s none of her business calling the cops and how he’d fuck all her excess flab and how it’s not his bloody fault her son is a crack head. Pero is in fact not a real junkie, he just smokes pot. Of course Radovan doesn’t know the difference or realise that smoking a joint does not mean that you’ll automatically switch to coke. It’s all the same shit to him. He’d send them all off for rehab with a couple of years’ hard labour on a building site. The cops heard him for sure, but couldn’t be bothered to come back up again. They only came to give a warning anyway. That’s

all they are obliged to do by law. But then they came across us on the ground floor. Well, dear Radovan, you really fucked us well on that one.

We'd also downed a bottle of *rakija*. One that Dejan nicked from his old man. Old Mirtić doesn't notice, cos he's got plenty of other bottles around and doesn't give a shit what kind of booze he drinks anyway. We really got loaded. Then one of us four geniuses, Dejan, Aco, Adi and me, had the idea of singing 'We are the Champions' to the entire block of flats. So we rang all the door phones, held onto each other and started howling something that sounded more like chucking up than singing. And that was the exact moment that the cops who had warned Radovan that his Šaban was too loud came by. They actually just walked past us, rolling their eyeballs, but then Adi, most wasted of us all, began banging on the intercom panel shouting.

"No one can get to us! We are stronger than fate! "

These are actually the words to a popular song by the Bosnian Serb folk singer Mitar Mirić, but it fucked up the whole situation. The cops suffered from humour failure, it seemed, and before we managed to complete the chorus of the Republika Srpska unofficial anthem, all four of us were in the back of the riot van. I can't remember how I got there, all I remember is that Adi was underneath me and Dejan on top of me. Then the doors closed and the van took off with us all trembling in the dark.

It was clear what this was all about. Classic. The cops used to fill their vans with kids who fished illegally on the nearby river. They would drive them around for a while and then dump them in a forest in the middle of nowhere to scare the shit out of them. Adi was caught once and he wandered around the forest until he came across some other cops. He sold them a load of bullshit about how he was at dance class and got lost on the way home and asked them to drop him off at home. And they did. What dumb-arses! They didn't shake him up as much as us though. To start with it was actually quite cool and Dejan kept shouting at the top of his voice.

"We are from Fužine, and we know where we are. You can't fool us, we have a compass! "

"What compass! It's called a compass you twat!"

Dejan kept at it and we kept laughing our heads off as Adi continued to sing the Mitar Mirić tune.

"*They can hate us, those who do not love us!*"

"Drive straight to Belgrade man!"

"I sure can, my friend, blindfolded!"

But then the fun was over. We started being thrown around the back of the van, falling over each other and these bloody idiots set off their siren, floored it and cornered like crazy. Not a sound from any of us. All you could hear is the thumping against each other or the side of the van and cries of pain and agony. I didn't know whether to try to keep my balance with my arms stretched out, or to protect my head. I couldn't really manage either and as we went round a corner somebody fell onto me and pushed me against the wall so I fell down and rolled around. I felt dizzy and the other three kept falling onto me. I decided to protect my head and wait for the madness to end. True hell. I was shitting myself big time and thought that was the end of us. The van kept going round corners and we were all on the floor holding onto each other. Then the moron braked suddenly and we all hit our heads. We'd stopped. The door opened and somebody pulled me out by my leg and I landed on the ground. Straight into a pool of mud. Aco fell on top of me. The cops drove off. I lay on the ground as Aco slowly peeled himself off me. I could hear Adi throwing up and I think Dejan cried. We were in the middle of some woods fuck knows where. It was raining. We lay in the stinking mud and for at least five minutes no one moved.

We wandered round that fuckin' forest for fuckin' ages. What the fuck, they dump you there and then it's your fuckin' problem what to do. Adi threw up again and Dejan felt really sick. We argued over which direction we should head into. We kept shouting at each other and Aco sat on the ground and said he wasn't going anywhere. That we should all just fuck off. Dejan started hissing something at him and Aco grabbed him to beat him up. Then he suddenly took off through the forest. We ran after him. I don't think I've ever been so fucking furious in my life. What morons these idiotic pigs! Fuck 'em all. Dejan and Adi kept at it for a while.

"We must be in the eastern suburbs."

"No way, the eastern suburbs are built up."

"We must be north then."

"You ain't been north in your life."

"Where are we then?"

"How should I know? Šmarna Gora."

"Šmarna Gora my arse. Šmarna Gora is a hill, you twat!"

I felt dizzy. I thought I was about to faint. Shaking, I wanted to cry. I had a funny feeling in my teeth. I kept biting my lips, clenching my fists and digging my nails into the skin of my palms. Had I met a cop at that moment, I'd have killed him. I swear. I was mental. Loony bin mental. All the fear from being thrown around the back of the van really did me in. I thought I was about to have a heart attack.

“To me this looks like Golovec Hill. Just from the other side.”

“The other side of Golovec is the motorway.”

“Come on! Call a cab, man!”

“And what’re you gonna tell him? To come to the other side of Golovec, under Šmarna Gora to the northern suburbs?”

“Have you got a better idea, or what?”

When I saw that fucking hunting lodge or whatever shit that old wooden hut was, I went berserk. I started throwing anything I could get my hands on at it. Stones, earth, branches, anything. I kicked the door with all my strength.

“Fucking cunts! Motherfucking bastards! What did we ever do to them, fucked up wankers! What did we ever do?!”

The others joined in. We smashed all the windows, tore down the door and totally trashed the place. I mean totally!

excerpt from the novel translated by Gregor Timothy Čeh