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The Greedy Bastard Diary

A Comic Tour of America

Eric Idle

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Extract

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History will be kind to me
for I intend to write it.

—WINSTON CHURCHILL

A GREEDY BASTARD TOUR

I'm eating dim sum with my friend Danny the guitar maker.

"I'm thinking of going on the road again," I say, "but the trouble is it costs so much to take a whole cast out on the road, you can't make any money."

"You should do a greedy bastard tour," says Danny.

"A what?"

"A greedy bastard tour. It's a rock-and-roll term."

"Really?"

"Yeah, that's like when you go out first time, you take a full band with a big crew and tons of buses and lots of lighting and fireworks, and it costs a bundle, and you lose a ton. So the next time you go, you do a greedy bastard tour, and it's just you and a geetar."

"I love it, that's it," I said. "That's the title: The Greedy Bastard Tour."

"But what if they don't get the irony . . . ?"

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the Greedy Bastard Tour. I am your Greedy Bastard for tonight...

DAY 1

TO CANADA AND BEYOND!

AS I LEAVE HOME, THE TEARS IN MY DAUGHTER'S EYES REMIND ME THAT THIS ADVENTURE COMES WITH SOME REAL COSTS, AND THAT I STAYED HOME FOR THE FIRST THIRTEEN YEARS OF HER LIFE FOR A VERY GOOD REASON. I try to reassure her that Thanksgiving isn't such a long time away, and I have a sudden flashback of my mother sending me off to boarding school with the same bullshit. Even my wife looks sad, which after twenty-seven years with the Greedy Bastard is certainly impressive.

I think of Michael Palin setting out on his great journeys. Mine won't be quite so bold: just to Canada, which is no longer terribly dangerous. Palin is probably in Pakistan at this very moment, eating dog with an Oxford-educated goatherd, interviewing yaks, and having his picture taken in front of a yurst, which is a kind of straw hut used for storing squirrels [*Bollocks.* —Ed.] while I am headed for an executive-class seat on Air Canada, but *chacun à son goût*, as the French say when looking at English food. I feel a bit

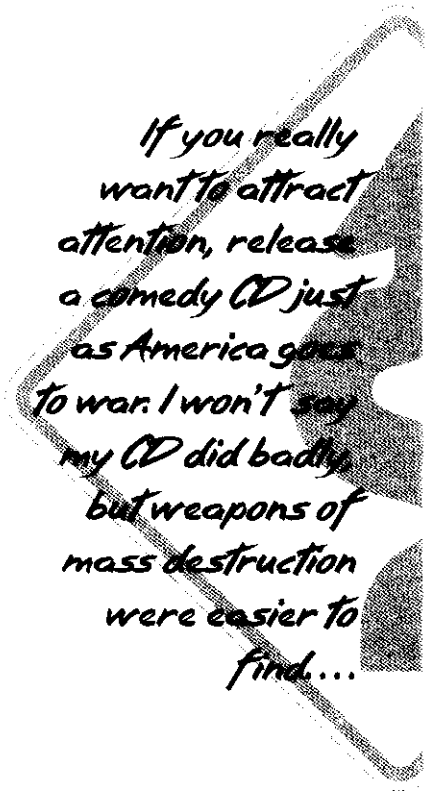
nervous encroaching on Palin territory by writing a travel diary. I want to avoid any unpleasant sense of stealing Michael's thunder, but most of the Pythons have been involved in documentaries recently: Jonesy walked halfway to Jerusalem in Crusader armor, holding a spear; Gilliam is the tragic hero of a classic documentary about the nonmaking of a movie; and even Cleesy went to Madagascar to invade the privacy of the lemurs. Only Graham has remained quiet. Death will do that to you. That's one of the reasons I am so against it. So, what is this urge by ex-comedians to get out there and examine the world? Are they tired of dressing up as women? Surely not. This tour will be almost *my* first time onstage drag-free.

For my diary, instead of a coffee-table book, I am planning to publish a dining-table book: a book so large that eight people can comfortably have dinner on it. Maybe it could even be a bedside-table book, or better yet a bathroom-table book with lots of photographs of nude women, but then I don't suppose there will be all that many nude women at my shows.

I am going on a bus tour of North America. Three months, and almost fifty gigs across the entire continent. It may seem a little odd at my age to be heading out on the road, but I have never done this and it seems to have a romantic gypsy feel to it. I like the idea of slipping offstage into a bed that takes me to the next gig, rather than having to line up to show strangers my socks at airports. As Kevin Nealon so brilliantly observed: How selfish and unthinking of the shoe bomber. *Why couldn't he have been the bra bomber? Or the panty bomber?* Kevin is a spectacularly funny man. Will I still be funny? Was I ever? These are the sort of anxious thoughts that fill my mind as I head for Canada.

I am flying into Toronto because my promoters are also greedy bastards, and it is cheaper to have me flogging my

show on TV and pimping my ass to the newspapers than buying expensive ads. In my experience there is nothing you can't do for promoters. It is only with the greatest reluctance that they allow you to spend a couple of hours onstage, away from the relentless interviews.



My Greedy Bastard Tour is kicking off in Rutland, Vermont, in four days' time, a starting point suggested by the Greedy Bastard's agent, who was formerly the head of the Greedy Bastard's record label. Having sold precisely three copies of *Eric Idle Presents Nigel Spasm's Journey to the Rutland Isles* (a pithy enough title), he has been trying to lure me out on the road in a blatant attempt to flog off the remaining twelve copies that lie unsold in the Artist Direct storeroom (a small closet near Wilshire Boulevard).

As the car searches for fast back routes through L.A.'s increasingly bad traffic, I congratulate myself on *not* bringing a camera crew. The observer alters the experiment as we all know from our readings of Heisenberg (actually, none), and the thought of having to appear cheery to a documentary crew first thing in the morning makes me sleepy, so I settle down for the first of many naps, unencumbered by the effort of having to make smart one-liners to a lens.

The flight to Toronto is on time and half empty or half full, depending on your point of view. The stewardess offers me a can of Spam to sign for her

brother while the West slips by beneath a huge, round jet engine, and I am struck by how colorful it is: reds and oranges and blues and tortuous canyons of rivers winding between towering cathedral bluffs. There is nothing at all down there, and I ponder a short fantasy about a tribe of Indians offering a new promised land to the Israelis. In no time they would have it blooming, if not Bloomingdale's, but would they really relocate here if lured by the prospect of easy gaming facilities? And who would the Indian tribe be: the Schmioux, the Dakoshers, or the Moe Hawks, perhaps?

Soon the land below is covered by a rust color, which looks like lichen from the air, before I realize that it is fall. The Rockies have an early sprinkling of snow, which outlines the winding paths of their peaks; an improbable pure blinding white line, snaking among the amber and russet of the forests. The stewardess is in a chatty mood and claims she saw us on our first visit to Toronto—good God, thirty years ago—on Monty Python's First Farewell Tour. We staggered off the plane jet-lagged, and as we came through customs there was a tremendous screaming, and we all looked behind us to see which rock-and-roll stars were arriving, only to be amazed by the realization that this yelling crowd was there to greet us: our first experience of the hype that occasionally surrounded Python. It all seemed rather agreeable, and we were placed on top of an open bus and led into Toronto by car horn–tooting fans. Welcome to North America. Not quite the Beatles, but not bad for comedians.

Incidentally, did you know that the first draft of the Canadian national anthem, "O Canada," was originally "Oh Sorry"?

DAY 2

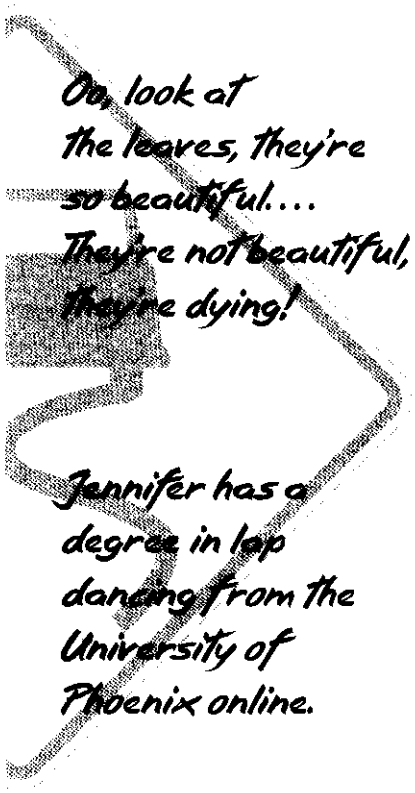
WELCOME TO CANADA



AWAKE REFRESHED AT 4:00 A.M. AFTER A NAP. THIS MORNING I HAVE TO FACE THE PRESS. I AM ON *GOOD MORNING CANADA*, BUT FIRST I HAVE A FEW HOURS TO MYSELF. I LOVE EARLY MORNINGS. I LIKE NOTHING more than a little laptop and a nice cup of tea. Oh, and a decent pair of pants, of course. *And* a good book, comfortable shoes, cashmere close to the skin, and a decent bed—that goes without saying. A warm bath, naturally, Egyptian cotton sheets, a plumpy duvet, and a Taylor guitar—mustn't forget that—as well as a fabulous sound system, a portable CD player, and a nice invigorating massage from a scantily clad . . . Come to think of it there's quite a lot more I like than just a bloody computer and a mug of tea.

This is supposed to be a greedy bastard tour but sadly I have already strayed miserably from the concept and brought along a large cast to help me onstage and off. Point man is my partner, the semilegendary John

ERIC IDLE



Du Prez, who has spent twenty-five years writing and producing songs with me, from the Python days and now to Broadway with *Spamalot,* a musical we have adapted from *Monty Python and the Holy Grail.*

My foil onstage is Peter Crabbe, a huge, terrifying, shaven-headed hunk of a man who is not averse to leaping into women's clothing at the drop of a chapeau. Peter will do duets with me, such as Nudge Nudge and the Bruces, and will also abuse the audience as a member of Homeland Security, a role he will rewrite every night as he panders shamelessly to local prejudices. On Friday in Rutland he will be ranting about New Yorkers coming out to watch the trees turning.

Onstage also is the lovely Jennifer Julian, who I exploited on my previous tour of North America. She is a very funny blond comedienne whom I have stolen from her radio station in Montana. Jennifer has a friend who made us a Penis Fish for the Bill Maher show and is currently making some kind of aquatic muff diving creature and a trouser snake. All these beasts, as well as Jennifer, will be along on the tour.

I seem to have developed a silly walk. I have been limping for the past three months and have been undergoing thrice-weekly physio for tendonitis, but my doctor, the legendary Kipper, announced just as I was leaving that it might be gout (what?) and gave me a couple of pain pills. They worked, too, but had worn off by the time I reached Canada, so I came into Toronto Airport in a peculiarly silly crab walk, with a bit of a sideways twist. Serves me right for my joke about John.

It was at Cambridge that I met the incomparable John Cleese. That was forty years ago. Nowadays John is using a silly walker . . .

It'll be me who needs the walker on this tour. Will I ever again dance naked in front of the Taj Mahal by moonlight? [*No. And he never has. The Greedy Bastard is clearly using too much tea again.*—Ed.]

The Canadian immigration official, softened by my oblique and obviously insane sideways approach to his desk, politely claimed to have seen my TV ads, so that's a good sign, although he didn't say whether he had bought any tickets. There is a hilarious moment in the arrival hall as baggage claim plays their own version of musical chairs, constantly switching the numbers on the luggage carousels so that just as seventy passengers have settled expectantly with their trolleys, they flash a new number, which sends the whole lot scuttling off down the far end of the hall. Then they change the number again. This is a good gag and clearly amuses the baggage handlers, since they try it a few more times. Eventually the baffled passengers give up and hover about in the center of the hall, muttering, defeated. This must be some kind of Canadian indoor sport.

My greedy bastard agent calls as I reach the room. He announces there is a beautiful woman on the phone with him. He seems to employ only beautiful young women. I must watch him rather carefully on this tour. He spells his name "Marc," with a *c*, and that is a little too hairdressery, don't you think? I bet he's a secret Mark who upgraded. He is sending me T-shirts for approval. This is what the Greedy Bastard Tour is all about: shifting merchandise. They refused to make the shirt

ERIC IDLE

These islands are filled with many diverse animals such as the bipolar bears, who are depressed from watching too much Fox TV News, and the little Penis Fish, which looks and behaves exactly like a little... fish.

I wanted. They said there would be no market for a shirt with the Penis Fish on it. Well, little do they know about the bastards who come to these shows . . .

The second day of the Greedy Bastard Tour passes in a whirlwind of interviews interspersed with sitting in traffic jams in the Don Valley Parking Lot, which is what they call their freeway. Everyone seems to like the Greedy Bastard Tour title, though *Good Morning Canada* will not say it on air, and when I mention it, they look shocked. Mild irreverence passes for wit at this time in the morning, and they all look very happy as I leave. Unless it's *because* I'm leaving. Only John Gibson on a Fox remote seems alive to the satirical possibilities of the title. "It's the greedy bastard era," I hear myself say, and I add, "I always liked your hair." He tells me he has ten wigs in it if I'd like one.

I am so brain-dead by the end of the day, after being endlessly questioned as to my motives for the Greedy Bastard Tour (duh, to make money) that I inadvertently say the "F" word on CBC Radio. Ooops. There is a shocked reaction from the control booth, and some people hold their hands over their mouths while others sneakily put their thumbs up in glee. Avril Benoit takes it in her stride and skips straight along. On CFRB (no, I don't know what it means, either) John Moore permits only one question from a listener, a man who goes on and on about how much he loves Monty Python, and how much Python merchandise he has bought. He has spent hours watching Monty Python, he says, "*while spanking the*

monkey!" I don't even have the good taste to let it go. "Spanking the monkey?" I say. "What kind of freak watches Monty Python while beating a chimp?" The host cuts quickly to the news and the newsreader says—honestly, I swear—"Welcome to the spanking news!"

