



Art Fist

Issue Six/April 2009

THE CHIPTUNE REVOLUTION

REVIEWED

SKY LARKIN

Will Sky Larkin's debut album live up to the hype?

INTERVIEW

MICK McCANN

Leeds-based author talks to Art Fist

FEATURE

JADE GOODY

I'd love to hate you, but...

CREATIVE WRITING

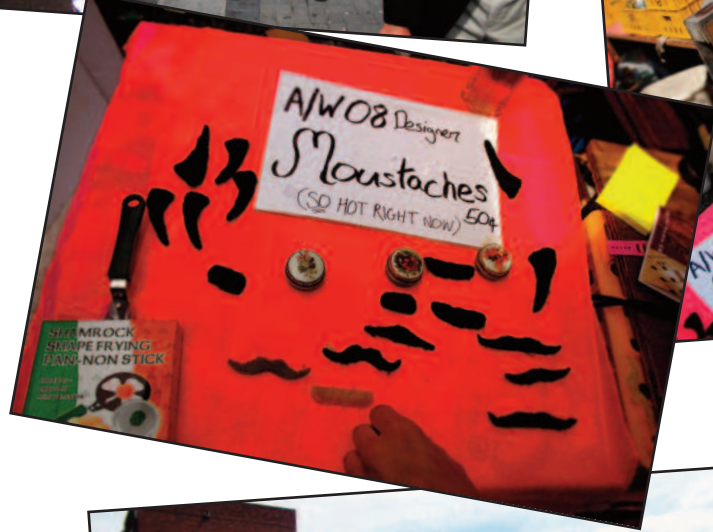
**JOHN LOGAN:
SPECIAL AGENT**

Is this the end?

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Image by Ellen Burroughs



Toejam Car Boot Sale
by Karin Lindel



Elektric Wreckage
by Karim Hetherington



Watching Paint Dry
by Jon Cronshaw

voice being given the chance to come down a notch and deliver fewer vocals but with more emotion; trailing off with a ballad's airiness. Wintermute build a craftsman-like quality into their music and this is increasing in its intensity as time goes on. Their album is due out at the end of April which gives us all something to look forward to as we wait with impatience as we finally have a long player from the band that is well over-due. Wintermute are very good musicians and cool to boot.

*'Dead Or Not He Was Wearing Sunglasses' is released on 3" CD format via Big Scary Monsters and free download available from <http://www.bsmrocks.com/main.html>
Check out Wintermute's website for more information and tour dates: <http://www.myspace.com/wintermuteband>*

The Trojan Project by Eileen Thornton

Paperback: 291 pages; **Publisher:** Austin Macauley (2008); **Language:** English; **RRP:** £8.99

Featured in the last edition of Art Fist, Lesley Jackson reads and reviews 'The Trojan Project.' A fast paced thriller set in the North of England; the book combines horrific details of a secret weapon and an adventure somewhat like 'Five do Chemical Warfare.'

Always blowing the trumpet of lo-fi art, here at Art Fist we love a good thriller or crime novel. Yes, you have your namby pamby literary fiction that has lots of meaningful levels to it and books that make you ponder and go hmmm but you can't beat a rocking good story with a car chase, unsung heroes to cheer for and an evil villain to whom you can cry boo! Eileen Thornton's 'The Trojan Project' has all of these elements as she has written a tense page-turner that would make a great film. If only they could get round the melting flesh bit.

Without giving too much of the plot away, The Trojan Project starts off in a farming community in Northumberland with farmer's wife Sarah wondering where her husband has got to. There is a mysterious green mist and a frantic search around the countryside when she witnesses her friend Dave die a horrible death and she realises that something has gone very, very wrong. From here we start a mad dash down to London as Sarah and her children escape death, pick up a helpful police officer called Andy on the way and are pursued by the military, who would also like to see them dead. Meanwhile, we discover exactly what Trojan is and the general skulduggery of the British government.

The Trojan Project is an enjoyable and frenetic ride from the north of England down to London as all manner of people are pursued in their turn down to the capital, where they can blow the whistle on the general nastiness that has been going on. If you don't delve too deeply, this novel is a fun way to spend a couple of afternoons with the odd unintentional funny phrase such as "The treacle like substance was Dave's flesh!" There isn't really any debate about the moral implications, the corruption within the government or the horror that the main characters have witnessed but for an example of this genre, that would not work. However, there are times when the novel isn't quite dark enough when you juxtapose the gruesome deaths with the sometimes Enid Blyton-like jolliness of the adventure, there are even two dogs involved called Lad and Bob. One wonders if some of the lines delivered by Thornton were unintentional or written with her tongue in cheek such as when we witness the death of the book's main villain with the reporter excitedly thinking, "This was something any news cameraman would die for."

The Trojan Project is a fun and fast-paced thriller set in England that will keep you entertained, and on this level it works well. Just don't read too much into the plot or expect a deep moral debate as you will have picked up the wrong book. Read it for what it is.

Welcome to Art Fist.

Thank God that Masterchef has finally come to an end. The winner of this year's competition looked as close to the stereotype of an evil genius as you are ever likely to find. For anyone familiar with the Command and Conquer series, this year's winner was played by Kane – the bald, goatied leader of NOD – and went by the name of Mat Follas.

As the winner of Masterchef, Follas has won the opportunity of a lifetime: split shifts, gruelling workload and constant abuse. If you believe the hype of Masterchef, you will probably think that being a chef is possibly the most glamorous job in the world. The simple fact is that it isn't. For those who haven't seen Masterchef in its recent incarnation, you are missing out on possibly the strangest show on television. At the start of each week a gormless bunch of hopefuls come onto the show and share their romantic notions of what it means to be a chef. Then after they've blasted a salvo of clichés about how great it is to eat, they get to the cooking. At this point its always fun to turn the volume onto mute and simply watch the magic: without the loud dance music booming over the visuals, you are left with a bizarre series of images of the contestants wiping sweat from their forehead, shaking a frying pan and dropping things into hot water - the sense of drama and tension dissipates quite quickly if you do this.

The thing that bothers me most about Masterchef is that anyone who comes on the show who isn't white and British gets pummelled with a series of crude racial stereotypes. Obviously anyone who is not white and British will 'cook to their heritage,' which in the judge's minds equates to cooking with spices. I could go on...

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Welcome to the new look Art Fist. Regular readers will notice higher production values than previous issues, but don't think that this means a drop in the quality of submissions. We now have what will hopefully be a regular comic strip exclusive to Art Fist by Jon Horler.

If you would like to write for Art Fist, send your work to artfist@live.com - we accept features, opinion pieces, rants, creative writing, reviews, images, etc. All we ask is that the work is clearly written and free from jargon.

Get Involved with Art Fist!

We are looking to expand and improve Art Fist in any way that we can. If you can help with designing and maintaining artfist.co.uk, if you want to help market and attract advertisers to Art Fist, or if you want to help with printing and distribution, get in touch. Art Fist is produced by volunteers, so any help will be greatly appreciated. All that we ask is that you can work under your own initiative.

195 Miles Review (Issue Five) - a correction.

We received an email in relation to last month's review of the 195 Miles exhibition at Project Space Leeds. I reproduce the email below in order to clarify any misunderstanding experienced by the reviewer and hope that Project Space Leeds accepts our apologies:

"It's lovely that you were able to cover the show in such a comprehensive way.

We were disappointed at Amelia Wood's article in which she wrote 'The smell coming from the hay and an actual live horse that Janis Rafailidou installed into the space, the latter for the launch only, showed little concern for the animal's welfare.'

This statement is actually rather alarming. I would like to point out that either the horse's owner or an equine vet was present throughout the day. In addition, it's worth pointing out that Janis is an extremely experienced horse woman, and keeps her own horse. Paddy was specifically chosen for his calm and docile nature (He is a Fresian). He usually works at funerals, weddings, galas and large events. He's pretty unflappable and loves attention.

The horse's handler came into the space before the event to conduct a risk assessment and to make sure that he was happy with the space and what would happen within it.

As you can see, we actually took a great deal of concern over the horse's welfare, and are rather upset by the insinuations made in the article.

It is potentially a serious allegation against PSL - which could have ramifications - and we would very much like you to correct this inaccuracy in the next issue.

Many thanks
Justine Gaunt"

The Art Fist team:

Editor and designer: Jon Cronshaw

Deputy Editor: Lesley Jackson

Staff Writer: Michael Dixon

Business Development: Pete Mills

Artists in Residence: Die Plankton

Email: artfist@live.com

www.artfist.co.uk

Reviews.

By Lesley Jackson

Sky Larkin - 'Golden Spike'

Leeds threesome Sky Larkin released their debut album 'The Golden Spike' recently and Art Fist picked up a copy to check it out. Headed up by singer and guitarist Katie Harkin, drummer Nestor Mathews and bassist Doug Adams, they have blended a catchy mix of alternative guitar rock with sweet feminine vocals. Her winsome voice sweeps over this album and coupled with the sweeping guitar, creates a long player that is a pleasure to listen to and is home grown in Leeds to boot.

Album highlights include the singles, 'I Fossil' and 'Beeline' which provide the melodies that stick on one's mind the most with the guitars that provide an almost metallic and jerky taste, the stop-start rhythm and the energetic interludes. 'Matador' is also a track that stands out from the first listen of the album as the track develops nicely from a light airy tune at the beginning to the crescendo of guitars and drums that trip along in an infectious four minutes of musical fun.

Recorded in Seattle on the Wichita label and produced by John Goodmanson, 'The Golden Spike' is a superb debut that improves with repeated listening. With a raw edge to it, as with the sound of most guitar-based debuts, it still has a feeling of completeness with a sound that is catchy and full. Once you start, you won't be able to stop, and it will not be long before many, many more people will have heard of Sky Larkin. Judging by this set of twelve tracks, 2009 sets to be a great year for this local band that Leeds can be proud of.

To find out more about Sky Larkin, visit their site on: <http://www.myspace.com/skylarkinskylarkin>

Wintermute Single Launch Party - January 30th @ The Library, Leeds

Wintermute are a musical breath of fresh air. With their infectious, catchy melodies and strong rhythm they are head and shoulders above the rest of the Leeds guitar-based indie bands. Why? When you hear a Wintermute song, you know immediately who is playing. I found this out, nearly to my peril, when I was driving home one night recently. Listening to the radio up popped a brief play of one of their tunes and their sound was so distinct and familiar, I had to do an emergency stop. Thank God no-one was behind me! The point is, Wintermute's sound is strong and individual and that is why you can pick them out of the musical crowd and why they nearly cause road traffic accidents.

So onto their live performance to launch their latest single, 'Dead or Not He Was Wearing Sunglasses.' Along with a strong musical identity, Wintermute can perform live with a sharply rehearsed set that contains an energy and verve that leaves other bands standing. Everything goes into the performance with a passion and professionalism that left the audience wanting more, even after the encore. When I've watched other bands recently, you always get the impression that they are very conscious of their appearance on stage whereas Wintermute are much more concerned with playing good music and as a result hold their audience captive. Dan Howard's lyrical vocals and sheer energy demand that you watch him and along with the jerky guitars and drummer, Ben Johnson, so absorbed in his job of providing a sharp pace, you are sorely disappointed when you realise that after they have played their set, the music has to stop.

'Dead Or Not He Was Wearing Sunglasses' follows in a similar style to previous single 'Gambling or Playing Cards' in that it builds itself in stages to a rocking chorus that contains a melody that stays with you for days. The second song, or B-side in old money, is of a slower tempo that we are unused to from the band but nonetheless holds your attention as the guitar tinkles along with Dan's

Encumbered.

by Laila Bebbington.

She tells him of her doubts, her flecks.
How resignation sits, it's reverence
the way it stumbles like broken limbs.

She says it is cracked glass, unfolding
the hue of ash, oceans, sand,
honey, running into crystal like a fire.

Milk. Eden's flower, floods through her smile.
Settles like leather, spoilt, tethered,
feathering petals across a scattered ruin.

A black cavern wanders in.
She climbs into a desert of green, falls through it,
melting a little, testing solidity.

Small tufts of flies float in, scattering beast
and prey, coiling against her brow.
Swollen bellies glitter, glisten when they break.

Falling into her mouth, black spurs, they cling,
full of stoppages, sails stuttering.
Her oils are fixated by their ploys, tales.

Faces, running like ribbons over her eyes,
too quickly to mount or avoid, too swift to halt or purge.
Filling too quick, soil in a glass.

Sentenced to the Lament.
Voice and nerves smother the ear, falls sick, fails
to still, sate, soothe, scent into a cloud, distance.

A coven of birds breathe into a void.
Majestic, wings flailing, wailing a single note.
Silence swings into a hiccup. Captivity.

THE CHIPTUNE REVOLUTION

by Michael Dixon

8-bit, Bit Pop, Chiptune, call it what you will. Is the future of electronic music, or is it just a strange fad for ubergeeks? Michael Dixon finds out...



When I was little I used to like playing video games with my mates because, well, who doesn't? But separating the normal kids from us geekerziods was that we used to read all the computer game magazines too. We justified it with the cheats that filled them, because discovering the Sonic level select code (up down left right, hold A and start) would make things better somehow. But really we were just a bit obsessed with games. They used to have reviews of the games which were largely bullshit because anything even half decent got at least 86%, meaning we had to redefine average as something around 9 out of 10, for Christ's sake, if I was a 9 out of 10 at anything I'd claim I was bloody spectacular at it. Anyway, some of the poncier mags used to break down the scores, with lots of percentages for lots of different aspects: graphics – fair enough it's got to look nice, gameplay – yeah obviously, value for money – makes sense us kidz iz poor innit? music – music? What?..... Who gives a toss about shitty 8-bit video game music?

Fast forward through about 16 pointless and largely wasted years and I'm in a half empty pub watching two teenagers singing a song about Super Mario; and instead of having a band with guitars and drums and so on, they're playing the music through a Gameboy. A Nintendo fucking Gameboy! They're called Superpowerless (www.superpowerless.co.uk)and they're brilliant. Seriously. Stupid, but brilliant. After going home and crying myself to sleep (nothing to do with the band, normal behaviour) I looked up all this silliness and found

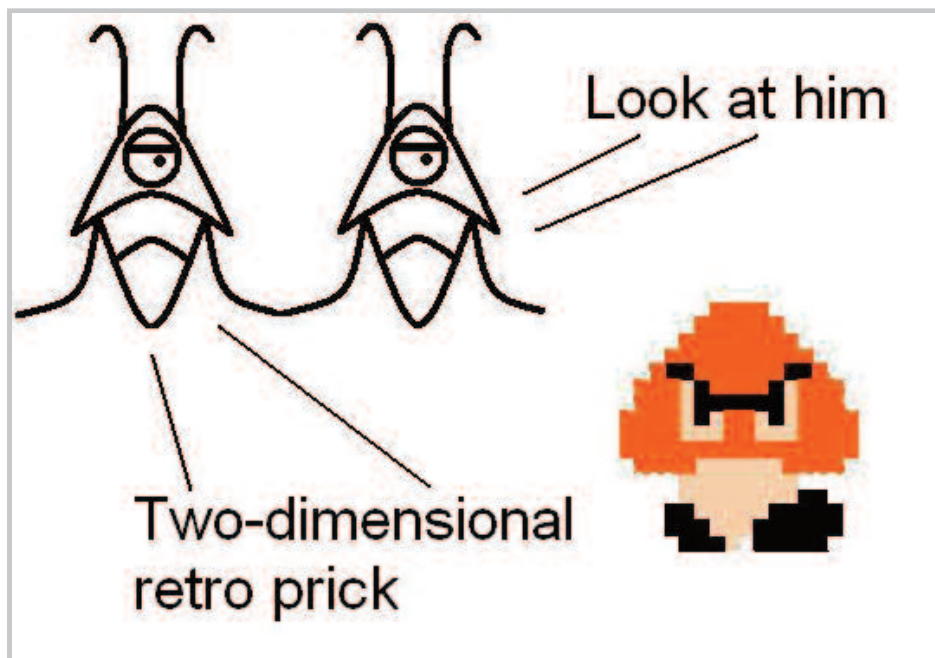


out that Superpowerless are part of the Chiptune scene. What is this Chiptune? Music for chips?

I discovered that Chiptune is actually music for chips, not salt and vinegar chips, windscreen chips or chips on shoulders, but microchips. That isn't a

tasty snack ready in 90 seconds; microchips live inside computers and are their brain, like Skynet in Terminator. This explains how Superpowerless managed to get their Gameboy to play the music they wrote; they wrote it in the secret Gameboy language! This is like in 'Babe' when the pig knows the secret sheep code. Secret codes = good things happen. Sheep go in pens. Electro-pop genius happens.

And it isn't just spotty teenagers in pokey box-rooms who've discovered this, Mr Beck 'don't ask about scientology' Hansen released an EP of Chiptune remixes a few years ago and R n' B superproducer Timbaland has done a bit of 8-bit sounding work for 50 Cent, so the scene is on the mainstream's radar, albeit not in a massive way... yet. However, give this 80s resurgence thing a few more months and the old-skool sound of video game noise might just become huge. All it'll take is for the Sugababes, or someone equally ghastly, to release a Chiptune inspired song and everyone will suddenly be going on about how ace the sound-track to StarFox on the SNES was. Maybe.



By Die Plankton

Leeds Moves to London.

by Stevie Kilgour

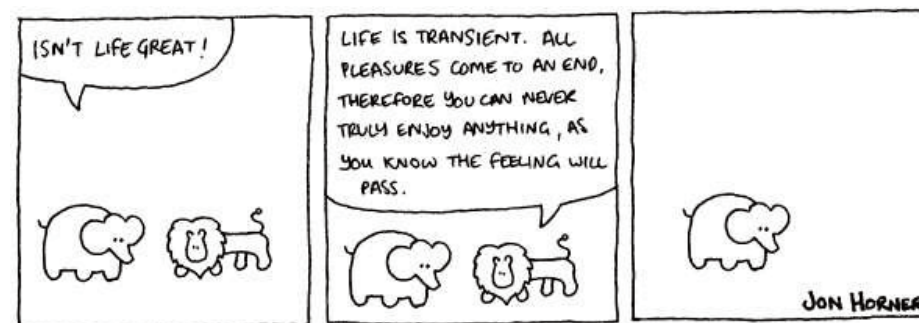
The UK's cities are poorly placed to weather the recession and must be handed more powers to tackle local economic problems if they are to lead the economic fight-back, a leading think-tank has warned.

The Centre for Cities says in its annual Cities Outlook report that, "despite the [Government's] rhetoric", the UK's cities are poorly placed to cope with the recession and no city will escape unscathed.

Cities such as Leeds have hit back and have taken drastic action by moving location altogether. In Leeds' case, it has decided to move to London to avoid any short term financial effects due to the recession. This has caused unrest in the Yorkshire area, with some other cities expressing how angry they are with the move. Both Sheffield and Huddersfield have been quoted as saying: "This is bloody typical of Leeds, we all knew that they would run off down south to stay with London while the rest of us struggle." In other cases, the move has caused even greater distress. Harrogate and Wakefield have said: "our Yorkshire midweek Snooker night just won't be the same". Bradford was last heard to be crying and screaming "why are they going, they can't do this too me. I know we haven't been getting on for a long time and everyone is aware of our split, but I need another chance. I can change." Before sinking to its knees and making that horrible heaving sound you get when crying.

Leeds agreed to meet with us to give their side of the story, but when we arrived to interview them, Leeds said simply it had "changed its mind about the interview and was in a rush to get going as the traffic can be difficult on the A1(M) on a weekday night". Leeds then continued to load cheap art prints and stereo equipment into a Transit van while holding a cigarette their mouth.

London response was "Oh no way, haha, Leeds you rude boy! We are well excited about Leeds coming to stay. It's too good for that batty-boy Bradford innit."



Say what?

by Michael Sterrett

It was a Tuesday afternoon and I was handing out flyers for a gig on the steps of the Leeds University library. A cold wind was whipping around and I had turned to drink despite the early hour and the fact that I was working. Allowing my brain to float off into reverie I imagined myself sat in my study at home, a low warm light burning as I watched something like 'Phantasm II' with a belly full of whiskey.

A crazy woman wearing a weird head scarf resembling a nun's wimple was wandering about the street drinking from a three litre bottle of strong cider and ranting at the passing cars. I was doing my best to stay out of her eye line when a young guy came and stood close beside me, a clutch of flyers in his hand. I didn't recognise him and assumed he was in the employ of another institution or promotions company. He was on a mobile phone so at least I didn't feel obliged to strike up a half arsed conversation.

The guy was mixed race, I'd say half Asian half Chinese, and dressed like an early nineties rapper with a pair of gold rimmed spectacles propped on the end of a podgy little nose. He brought to mind the film 'House Party' with Kid n' Play. He was involved in a long conversation with someone on the other end of the line and spoke in a broad but slightly effeminate Yorkshire accent.

Making no effort whatsoever to hand out any of his flyers (they were long thin ones for a local concert venue) he sat down on the small wall behind us and removed a sandwich from his bag. Between bites he continued his conversation which seemed to be about the faltering health of an elderly relative.

"So I went round on Monday and spoke to the nurse" -chomp, gulp.- "And she says she could go into a home because of her legs n' that, but mentally it might be the final blow for her..."

I handed a flyer to a young girl with short blonde hair. She was very pretty and smiled at me as she took it from my hand. For half a second I imagined fucking her. Her small hard body writhing under me as I tore into her. Punishing her for something, punishing her for her beauty. The thought disappeared as quickly as it had arrived, already a ghost in the dimming light of the day.

"But I've got to think of myself at the end of the day, don't I?" said the guy.

Some of the filling from his sandwich fell out of the bread and onto the ground. He didn't look too bothered. A pigeon idled over with apparent disinterest, picked up what looked like a piece of sweetcorn in it's sharp little beak and ran off with it.

"I mean, when I went round the other day she said she would make me a cup of tea but she could barely get out of the chair. I ended up making one for both of us. It's just not fair on me, is it?"

At this staggeringly selfish pronouncement he got up off the wall, dropped the sandwich rapper into a nearby bin along with the rest of his flyers and walked away with an optimistic swagger that suggested satisfaction at a job well done.

It began to rain and I put on my hat, letting the rain fall on me and listening to it's music.

Number 7

by Ben Smith

Numbers, for various purposes, have throughout popular culture been positioned with some kind of special power or significance. 3. 7. 10. 22. What do these numbers mean? If I said 626 would that really have any greater significance to anyone reading this than 101.

Although I have long been interested in the significances in this numerical oddness it was an article about a particular subject which has led me to document my own intrigue.

"The best song on an album is always number 7".

I can't remember where and when I heard this theory or explanation, but it was definitely in a music magazine circa 2005 with a lead singer of a band. I would hazard a guess at Q magazine and Damon Albarn but I couldn't be sure.

He, of course, gave examples of a few of the albums that he happened to stumble across in his own collection. Of course his theory was proved by the albums that he came across. Though I wasn't particularly interested in the albums he chose to relay this theory I was intrigued by the concept. Was there a pre-determined 'insiders only' rule which meant that the artist's best efforts are reserved for the slot precisely between the 6th and 8th place on their long-player?

In my own experience and understanding of the mythology of numbers and popular culture, one can attach a great deal of significance to the identifying of an artefact with a number. There are thousands. Examples in sport can be found linking a player's identity, position and history to the number of their shirts. Michel Platini, Diego Maradona and Pele all wore the number 10. The number 10 in football is the 'fantasista', the position that allows players and fans alike to dream. Is this the same case in music, where the 7th track allows the band to believe for a fleeting moment that they are the best band in the world?

Any correlation can be a combination of lots of factors jointly historical, geographical and societal.

Discussing this article, and the theory behind it, with some friends earlier in the week, I was surprised to learn that they had not heard about this concept. They thought that the quality of an album went in the shape of a W. High standards at the start, followed

Feature | Column

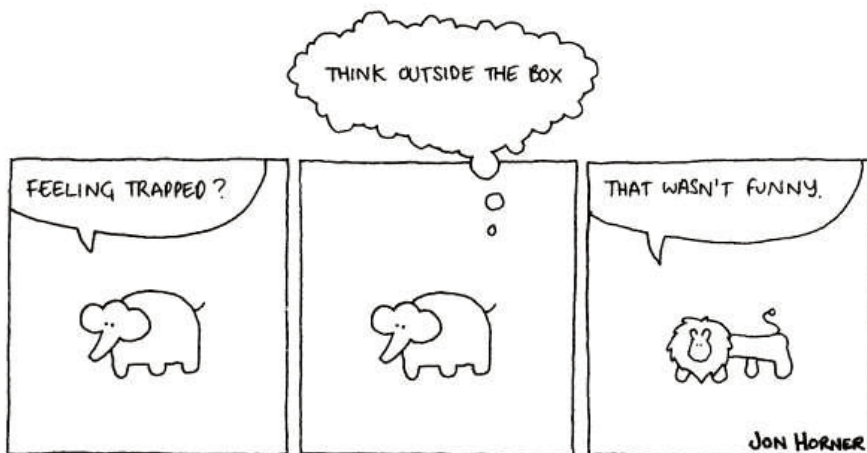
by a lull in quality and then an improvement through the middle of the album. The penultimate track of an album is generally accepted as usually being the weakest moment (debate this too if you will) with usually a strong finish to leave the listener on a high. This idea stresses an institutionalised requirement for standards within the production of an album.

Also, what is 'best'? Is it the hit single on the album, the live favourite, the exploration of a new musical avenue? It really could be any of these. Perhaps for the Ipod generation, this term could be easily defined as the song you flick straight to when you only have 3 or 4 minutes on the way to work or waiting for somebody. I tried this experiment out whilst on the train recently by randomly selecting an album to see if this rule applied.

The albums that fate (and the click wheel) selected were AC/DC Back In Black and The Shins Wincing The Night Away. I'm sure that anyone reading this article could instantly name dozens of albums on their MP3 player and their choice of track. I can do this on both the albums I've mentioned here. On The Shins album, it is Turn On Me. On the AC/DC album it's You Shook Me All Night Long (just ahead of Back in Black). Both these songs happen to be the 7th song on the album.

Like any theory based on opinion there is most value in the fact that it provokes debate, conversion and a deep personal interest. Is your favourite track on your favourite album the number seven? It is an interesting and thought-provoking issue and may tell you more about your friends' music tastes than you knew before.

I admire the concept that a band would save their best song to have its own special place in the running order. To reward their own endeavours by giving the chosen song that place on a pedestal indicates a great level of responsibility, dedication and ultimately self-confidence.



Creative Writing

Randall Tharangea asked The Captain to step inside the quadrant whilst he spoke to the tour party. The Captain who had two red stripes down his face and neck and presumably all the way down to his toes was telling everyone about his forthcoming adventure and how it was going to be his last voyage... he was getting old and he was on his last receipt roll, evidently.

Throughout this speech another man was trying to sell knocked-off Cluedo boards. The Cluedo boards were very good in fact but all the rooms had been changed, for example the Ball Room was instead: The Spare room. On closer inspection, the boards turned out to be the 'upstairs' level of the Cluedo manor. Kathryn got annoyed with this chap trying to sell upper level Cluedo boards. Whilst everyone was engaged in the argument Randall Tharanga snuck off to sign up for the expedition and hopped aboard The Captains' Galleon or whatever it was. I think it was a barge or a sludge tanker.

Randall Tharanga waved from aboard the vessel, and stepped into his quadrant and disappeared, vanished!.

Kathryn Cooper was quite annoyed with Randall Tharanga because he didn't drop her off at the locomotive station.



ISIS (On Planet) by Karim Hetherington

Randall Tharanga read the telegram out loud, it went as follows:

I'd be up for a shot of Tennis STOP
Young laddy STOP
Sonny boy, young sonny m'boy laddy old bean STOP
Are you up for Tennis? STOP

This was the wrong telegram for sure!

'Yo! Anything else come for me while I was gone?'

The character bent down to rifle through the disarray of boxes inside the neon desk for a moment. 'Of course. This turned up with your telegram' he handed Randall Tharanga a complex knot, which was attached to the lead of some old fashioned headphones.

'I suggest you head to the market with that knot. They say the greatest un-tier of knots runs a stall there ...he wears an elegant beard and looks like a post-impressionist golfer, he also hunts truffles, can you imagine? Keep yuh eyes peeled though, some say he's a real were-wolf...for real' (Kathryn Cooper gasped).

Randall Tharanga asked the character behind the desk what would be the quickest way to this stall on the market.

'Yal have to buy this book I'm afraid. Your journey will sure be planned out in that book though I'll bet you a dollar and a doughnut!'

Randall Tharanga handed over a few grams of gold to the man behind the front desk and was passed a chunky guide book in exchange. It was entitled Roman Alaska World Enterprises Short-cuts Atlas.

Later on, the tour arrived at its second and penultimate stop: the greatest un-tier of knots stall at the market.

The greatest un-tier of knots stood inside a little booth which was remarkably like the Tourist Information booth from earlier on in the tour. Randall Tharanga asked the greatest un-tier of knots if they could conduct an interview with him for the benefit of the tour.

'Sure thing mite' the greatest un-tier of knots obliged.

It was at this point that Randall Tharanga bought a round of truffles from the stall for everyone taking part in the tour. Randall Tharanga kindly handed everyone a Ferrero Roche each. It emerged that the greatest un-tier of knots' real name was Wolf Harris. The resemblance to Rolf Harris was obvious to everyone, only he was a little more hairy. Randall Tharanga asked Wolf Harris to "please stand within the quadrant while you speak".

Part way through the interview Wolf Harris tried to play a wobble board and sing a song for everyone. But unfortunately, it was a right old racket because Wolf Harris picked-up a thunder sheet by mistake. Some people on the tour thought that it was thundering and lightening and whispered and wondered whether he might change into a werewolf right before their eyes. But this didn't happen at all. Instead, Randall Tharanga left the pair of headphones for him to un-do the knot in and the tour embarked on the third and final leg.

Randall Tharanga again consulted the Roman Alaska World Enterprises Short-Cut Atlas.

The tours' third attraction was to go down to the harbour and meet The Captain who was trying to put together a crew to go on an expedition. He just needed one more person.

Jade Goody, "I'd love to hate you, but..."

by Colin Cox

Firstly before you read on, I don't want you all to think that this is just a simple anti-Jade Goody rant; that would be far too easy. What I want to ask in this article is why is it no longer acceptable to hate this horrible woman just because she's dying? Don't get me wrong, I feel as bad for her as the next person, but I have noticed that she has gone from being portrayed as this vile, racist, ignorant, dim-witted thickstick who is famous for sucking some guy off on Big Brother, to being a mass media darling; why is this? It is to a large extent because the tabloids and celebrity magazines like to try and dictate who are the 'goodies' (no pun intended) and who are the 'baddies' - a bit like WWE wrestling.

Before she was ill she was very much a symbol of both hatred and aspiration depending on who you asked. One day the papers are calling her the most hated woman in Britain; now she's ill, the papers have done a complete u-turn and the Sun have called her an 'inspiration', whilst the Mirror have been referring to her as 'a working class hero'. I've known several people that have died of the big C; some of these people spent their remaining time doing some good, all Jade has done is appear in yet another reality show about her treatment and declining health. I suppose this is what she does best. I understand that she wants to provide for her two children and I have the utmost respect for that, but surely she's robbing herself and her family of the privacy needed at this point. There's no dignity in public suffering and certainly no dignity in constantly being pictured in the tabloids, dying or not.

The whole situation seems a little tasteless. Her publicist, Max Clifford once predicted "With good management and a bit of luck Jade can last another two or three years as a celebrity". And, he thinks, the public deserves the celebrities it gets. "I think the magic is that anybody watching Jade would think, 'I could do that, and I could do that better,'" he says. "More and more young girls and boys want to be famous. And if Jade can be, anyone can be. She makes them feel intelligent" (The Independent). Now thanks to her illness, we've all been forced to endure weeks of non-stop Jade in the papers and on the TV. Jade has become an icon and has proved that you don't need to be talented to make it to the top; you just need a very unfortunate turn of events and a very cunning and yet very ruthless PR guru representing you. So, in summary: Jade Goody, I would dearly love to hate you but I'm afraid that I'm no longer allowed to.

Gimme Some TNA

by Jon Cronshaw

TNA Impact wrestling is now the second-largest wrestling company in America and boasts an array of some of the finest wrestlers in the world including Olympic gold medalist Kurt Angle, Mick 'Mankind' Foley and 'the Icon' Sting. Art Fist editor Jon Cronshaw went to check it out.

TNA, or Total Non-Stop Action, is perhaps the most entertaining wrestling company in the world. The bouts take place in a six-sided squared-circle and they use three letters for a four-worded name. Mathematical irregularities aside, seeing TNA Impact live at Birmingham's National Indoor Arena was an experience of theatre in its purest form. Forget Beckett, forget Miller – if you want exciting storylines, amazing acrobatics and choreographed violence, then look no further!

It's a great excuse to watch muscle-bound, greased-up men fight in their pants with my heterosexuality firmly intact. So, why did I go? A friend of mine won tickets in pie-eating contest two towns over, and it would have been rude not to (a simple made up answer that can justify almost anything).

I was interested to see how some of the TNA characters would play out in the UK. Suffice to say that Sheik Abdul Bashir AKA 'The Middle Eastern Nightmare' did not cause the same venom and vitriol that he receives in the US. His character embodies America's fears: he's an Arab and he hates America. Bashir's signature move is 'The Weapon of Mass Destruction' and the commentators tell us that 'every word that comes out of his mouth is an anti-American slur' and point out his 'anti-American posture' (whatever that may be). Send in the all-American Consequences Creed in his stars and stripes trunks and cape and you have an ideological nightmare which is about as subtle as Paris Hilton is fat. It did seem that the TNA Impact organisers figured that this would be an issue in advance, however, and pitted Bashir against the seven-foot tall Abyss. Bashir is what is known in the wrestling world as a 'heel', which means that he is the perpetual bad guy and the character that everyone wants to boo. So Bashir, instead of being portrayed as a terrorist, becomes a mouse-like coward, running around the outside of the ring from Abyss in what looked like an incredibly disturbing Benny Hill sketch. On this occasion, the organisers were smart; they adapted Bashir's role to work in a different context. The one thing that I learnt from the event was that 'wet floor' signs can make excellent weapons.



A tour of Leeds - West Yorkshire (1987)

by Laurence Collyer

The tour was devised and presented by the historical novelist Randall Tharanga. The tour began in a small park near an old church on New Briggate. Randall Tharanga pulled up on tandem bicycle (which had the name Balthazar hand-painted on the frame) and greeted everyone outside a small booth which seemed to be made out of cardboard and displayed the sign Tourist Information. Randall Tharanga was dressed like a dusty Geography teacher and carried with him a quadrant. The tour procession followed him at a really fast walking pace (because he was riding a bicycle and everyone else needed to keep up with him!).

Randall Tharanga spied up ahead a hitchhiker. As he and the crowd drew nearer, the figure intriguingly raised an arm and stuck out a thumb. Randall Tharanga politely told the hitchhiker that he was conducting a tour about Leeds. The hitchhiker, who's name was Kathryn Cooper asked Randall Tharanga if he was going near the locomotive station. Randall Tharanga confirmed he would be stopping by there nearer the end of the tour and so Kathryn Cooper vaulted on to the back of the tandem and the tour continued...

The first stop on the tour was The Moodland Hotel. Randall Tharanga's trusty steed Balthazar snorted like a Billy goat and the brakes slammed like a drake as he and Kathryn Cooper came to a halt outside the entrance to the hotel. Randall Tharanga complained his legs were "as stiff as broom handles"! as he propped the tandem up against the building. Randall Tharanga announced to the tour that they must all come inside. Leading everyone in, Randall Tharanga stepped out into the middle of the hotel lobby, ceasing a slide across the polished floors. 'You got a telegram for me?' he said.

'You got it! Mister Tharanga! Yip. This came in this'arvo

He looked up to see the character behind the technicolour front desk and was distracted (we all were) by the design of a marvellous grotto-like-structure with diamonds and crystals jutting from a rock face that surrounded him. A guest at the hotel sprung up from an arm-chair to take the elevator. A 'strongman' stood by dressed in a leopard skin patterned 3-piece suit holding a sledgehammer. 'What floor please?'

'The fifth!'

The elevator doors slid open and the guest stepped inside.

'Going up' The strongman, come - lift operator, come burley barrel-chested brute, called as he gave a bulbous red button at the foot of the elevator an almighty whack. This sent the elevator charging up to the 5th floor like nobodies business. The strongman looked on from his post, expressionless as his efforts resulted in no prize (After all, it was a hotel not a fairground!)

Creative Writing

John dived to the floor as the first shots rang out, narrowly missing death by inches. John drew his piece and fired back at the unknown attackers; they were wearing body armour and carrying automatic weapons. There was no way John would be able to kill the lot of them with his relatively small 45, so he knew he had to escape quickly. John fired through the nearest window and dived through the broken glass, turning in mid-air as he fell and firing back at the gaping window, firing until he ran out of bullets, then reloading the clip and continuing to blast away at the bastards. Eventually he hit the ground, the fortunate placing of a bush braking his fall and thus leaving him unhurt, with bullets slamming into the ground around him John made for his car and jumped in, speeding off into the darkness as hot lead kicked up dirt all around him. What the hell was a hit squad doing guarding the mayors details? John hoped the document in his hand would tell him, he'd kept hold of the major's file, with luck this would give him everything he needed.

After driving like a bastard from the scene for what felt like forever, John finally felt he was safe and stopped at the side of the road to survey his bullet riddled car and have a look through the mayor's file. Flicking through the papers he came across something very interesting, something very interesting indeed. The mayor had been adopted as a child; his parents had been killed in a car crash and he and his younger brother had been placed into the city's care. The mayor had subsequently been adopted by the Wulsheltz family, and his brother had been adopted by the.... holy fuck! The Fitz family. The mayor and Mickey Fitz were brothers! Wulsheltz was the brother Fitz had spoken of, the man Fitz had been so scared of; the Mayor was the man behind the whole damn thing!

It all made perfect sense, only the mayor's office held full details of all the eel permits held by the city's citizens, without this knowledge arranging so many eel thefts would have been damn near impossible. And yet this had been overlooked by the bureau, because the bureau chief had told the investigation teams not to look into the mayor, where had the chief received this order? His boss, the mayor! John knew who his target was now, and it was time to take the motherfucker down.

Feature | Column

"Mate, you swim like a dickhead."

by Phill Huxley

I'm in a small swimming baths in the suburbs of a provincial English city.

I like to keep fit, though I've never ever been to a gym in my life, therefore swimming is a good solution. When I was about fourteen, I swam a mile. I have no idea how I did that.

I would describe my swimming style as unorthodox. I guess this stems from my only real fear or phobia. Going underwater.

I can't explain this fear and it makes no sense. I have no idea where it came from but I've always had it. It must be something to do with not being able to breathe, but that is not everything. Any others I've had, heights, needles - I've conquered without a problem. This one sticks.

I remember when I was at school, I think probably the only detention I ever had was when I got into an argument with the PE teacher after I refused to dive to the bottom of the pool and get the brick. I said no, then I ended up getting out of the pool and totally refusing to even try. I just couldn't do it.

When I swim, it is a bit like a dog. My neck cranes and my head sticks out of the water. And sometimes there is a lot of effort for very little movement. I am better than I was, but I'm sure it looks a little strange.

Last week was the school holidays. Bad news for swimming, but I needed a bit of nager nager. It was packed with kids breaking all the rules of the pool - splashing, bombing, heavy petting - it was all going on. The lifeguard watched on gormlessly, whistle hanging dormant around his neck. When I'd got there, the guy at the counter raised an eyebrow at me as if to say "are you sure you really want to venture in there?"

"Yes" I replied in my mind as I searched my wallet for the correct change to use the lockers, "I'm going in."

I was ready. I was brave and prepared to dodge the inflatables and hormone fuelled adolescent teenagers.

It was going so well and I was slaloming through the parade of obstacles in my path as I

did my lengths. Then confrontation hit.

You know in the Wild West movies when the two cowboys face up to each other and there is tension filled incidental music? Well here in Bramley Swimming Baths on a mid-week afternoon, this was my Wild West moment. The only differences were that we didn't have guns, we were both wearing swimming trunks and one of us was about thirteen. So only three real differences there from those old movies. Everything else was basically the same.

As I swim up to the deep end, the kid hits me with his best insult. He's been working on it, you can see. How to best impress his friends. Some time has been spent on the sentence construction and tone here. And it's not easy for him to say it, he blurts it out.

Let's analyse.

Mate - A friendly opening designed to suck me in before he hits me with the killer punch. Like a check-raise in poker. He's cunning this boy, I'll give him that.

Dickhead - Another interesting choice.

Firstly, perhaps he doesn't know any real swear words? Though I find this hard to believe.

Secondly, maybe he's scared that if he uses too strong a word I'm going to deck him or steal his pocket money?

And thirdly, how exactly does a dickhead swim?

Now, a dilemma, what do you do when a thirteen year old kid insults you? It's a difficult problem at the best of times. When you are doing a slightly awkward doggy paddle it complicates matters further.

I did what I do best. I gave him a dirty look. The one I use on people when I think they are trying to bluff me at the poker table. Trust me here, it's a good one. I think that did the trick, his chortling subsided and he fixed me with a stare of his own, but as he was only thirteen, a lot of work clearly had to be done with his glaring. To be honest, it was poor and lacked penetration. Thus. I win.

And then I used my killer move. As I pushed off to swim back to the other end of the pool, I kicked my legs really hard and completely splashed him with water. It was smooth. Trust me, it was smooth.

works on the new steel plant in town. John downloaded the picture and blew it up to fill the screen, going over every inch of the image. He was pleased not to find Fitz anywhere. However, he couldn't totally make out the faces at the very back of the image, the quality was too low. John had to be sure. Saving the image onto a disk, he left the apartment.

It was time to go back to work.

In the bureau image lab John fed the picture into the computer for analysis, he zoomed into the section that had been too small on his computer at home and had a closer look. There were certainly people there, but they were just made up of a few pixels, John couldn't make out their faces. But by enhancing the image John could see who it was, it was Fitz! John grabbed a nearby technician, he had a question.

"Is it possible" he asked. "To automatically search for any pictures online containing two faces?"

"Yeah sure" replied the technician. "Who you looking for?"

"This guy" said John, pointing at Fitz. "And this guy."

"Wulsheltz?" said the technician. "You investigating him?"

"Depends on the results" said John. The technician drew around the two faces on the computer and entered a few details. He then set the computer to work, searching the internet for pictures that contained Wulsheltz, before enhancing the background and checking for Fitz. After about five minutes the results were through. "2,145 matching pictures" said the screen. John looked through the first few, they really did show Fitz lurking behind the mayor.

"Wulsheltz" said John. "I'm investigating the fucker now."

There was no way in hell John would have ever have got authorisation to look through the mayor's personal files at the city records department, so John went there in secret. He was looking for anything that might link Fitz to the mayor, no matter how minor. He had to work out what Fitz had been doing in all those photographs. Eventually John came across the mayor's file and was about to open it up, when he heard a sound, someone was watching him.

nesses. He'd shown those bastards.

Going back further into the past brought John painful memories. He looked through the earliest entries from when he was in the military. He thought back to the missions he'd undertaken, and the men he'd lost. He remembered how people had treated him on his return to the city, the hippy who'd spat in his face and called him a murderer. No-one had understood what he'd been through. No-one had given a damn. Where the hell had his god-damn parade been?

Over several more pitchers John continued to go through his newspaper clippings and the memories they brought back. Eventually he came across a photo of him being presented with the freedom of the city by the current mayor, Joe Wulsheltz; John had been granted the honour after 20 years on the force. He looked fondly at the photo of him with the grinning mayor; it'd been one of the proudest days of his life.

But something drew John's eyes away from himself and the mayor to the photo's background, someone was there that shouldn't be, someone who John wouldn't have expected to see with that crowd, Mickey Fitz, the small-time punk who'd been John's only suspect in the eel case. The son-of-a-bitch who'd died out of fear of his brother. The brother no-one at HQ could trace. What the fuck was he doing at that presentation?

John searched through his documents until he found another photo that included the mayor; from when John had led the City Crime Bureau training academy, and the mayor had presented John's graduates with their badges. Looking closely at the photo of himself and the graduates with the mayor, John was shocked to notice Fitz lurking in the background. Something was weird about this. Why the hell was Fitz in these pictures?

John decided to do a little research. He turned his computer on and went to the mayor's official website, there would be countless pictures of the fucker there, the publicity seeking son-of-a-bitch was always trying to appeal to anyone and everyone. Sure enough, on the front page was a picture from only the day before, when the mayor had laid the ground

Lucha London's Dating Advice Column.

Soothsayer and folk hero Lucha London returns with his regular column on dating and romance. This month sees a change of pace for Lucha; after all, life isn't just girls, girls, girls.

I'm sure we've all heard the saying "With great power comes great responsibility". I agree that the two go hand-in-hand, however, I think that old Uncle Ben got it ass-backwards.

With responsibility comes power.

Now, before I get into it, I'd like to say that responsibility does not actually exist. If you break down the universe into its component particles, you will not find one single atom of responsibility. It's just a made-up idea that we lowly humans use to understand the universe, because we are incapable of seeing the true workings of things.

So, to say that this person is responsible for a problem, or that person is to blame for something, is completely false with regards to reality.

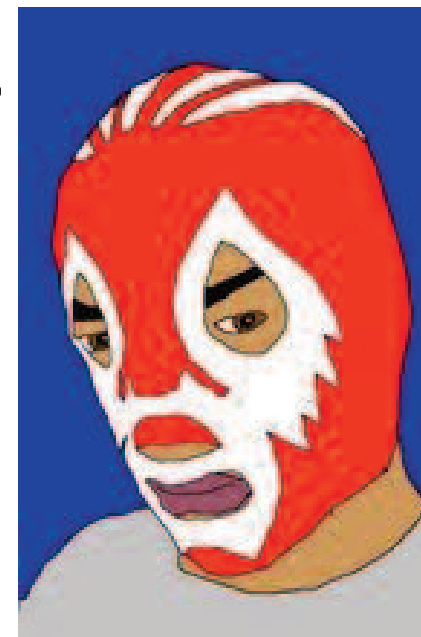
That said, it is a useful mental tool if you use it right.

If something is not working as you want it to, the natural thing to do is put the responsibility on someone else. She didn't give me her number because she was uptight. My friends insult me because they're jealous. Whatever.

But, with responsibility comes power.

Only when you take responsibility for a situation or problem, do you have the power to change things.

My friends insult me because they're jealous = my friends are at fault, and they won't change the situation. My friends insult me because I allow it to happen = I am at fault, so I have the power to change the situation.



If you take responsibility for every aspect of your life, then you have the power to change every aspect of your life. If you blame others for everything, then you have the power to change nothing.

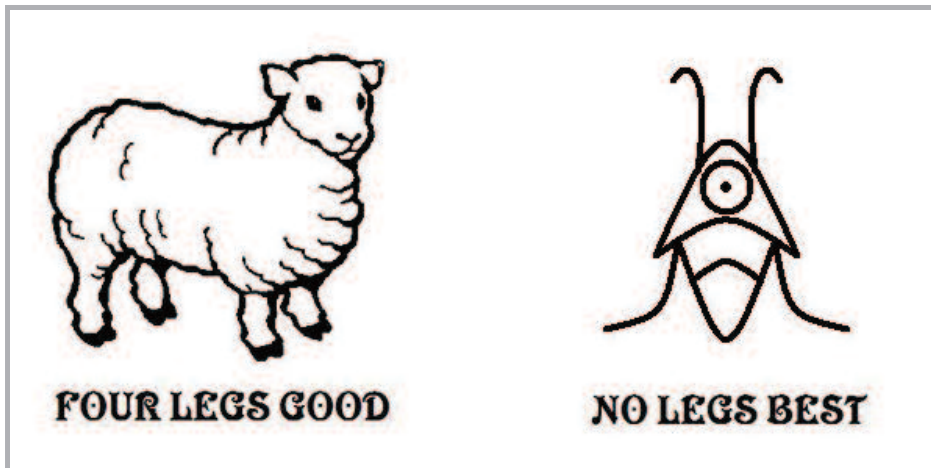
So take responsibility for everything. If it seems like something isn't your fault, make it your fault. TAKE BACK THE POWER TO CHANGE.

Your wardrobe isn't good enough because you didn't invest enough time/money into getting it right. Your body isn't as good as you want it to be because you didn't hit the gym enough, and you didn't make the effort to eat right. You aren't as socially skilled as you want to be because you chose to keep your own company instead of socialising. You aren't as good with girls as you like because you didn't fix the obvious shit. You're too afraid to approach women because you allow your fear to control you. Every other problem in your life is your fault.

If something is your fault, then it is on you to fix them, and not on someone else.

So if you take responsibility for these things, then you have the POWER to change them. And if choose not to change them, it is your fault.

*Lucha London welcomes your questions and comments:
luchalondon@googlemail.com*



By Die Plankton

John Logan: Special Agent Part V

by Michael Dixon

Special Agent John Logan of the City Crime Bureau is trying to find out why someone is stealing all the city's eels, but he's getting nowhere fast. And with the unexplained death of the only suspect quickly followed by the abduction of the eels that helped John break him – Logan is completely despondent.

Sat alone in his tiny downtown apartment, John continued to work his way through the fourth pitcher of mojitos. In the next room he could hear a phone ring, he hadn't answered the damn thing in two days, the call went straight through to the answer machine.

"John, it's me again". It was the chief; he'd been calling all weekend. "I know you're having a tough time. We can help you. You just need to open up to us. Call me back anytime. Okay?"

There was no way John was going to call back any time soon, he'd made his mind up, he was giving up the job; he couldn't solve the case and it seemed like everything he touched turned to shit. Fuck the case he thought. Fuck the fucking case. He'd hand in his badge once he could bear to drag himself up to HQ.

Looking through his scrapbook, John remembered the events that had defined his time in the force, flicking through newspaper clippings detailing the moments of his career that had brought him brief infamy. Thinking back to the Latonza case made John smile. The former city mayor, Ray Latonza, had been in court on fraud charges, when John had shocked everyone by bursting into the courtroom and shooting him to pieces. John had to spent a week in the toughest jail in the city before the autopsy results would come in and secure his freedom; the man he'd shot was in fact a robot, built by the Smith Street Gang to assassinate the judge. The real Latonza had been held hostage by the gang for over a year and this robot had been running the city in his place. And to think those motherfuckers had laughed when John had demanded an autopsy on Latonza, a man shot over a hundred times in front of twenty wit-

Artists' Showcase

Jon Stanley Austin, Photographer.

The images are of my nana's house, just before she was moved to a home. I wanted to try and portray how beautiful I found her house personally. It held so so much character. From the wallpaper, to the toilet, to the recliner. I wanted to create these images, because i realised as soon as she moved to her home, some property developer would pick up the house, strip it of it's beauty, and replace it with your every day laminate floors and white paint.



www.jonstanleyaustin.com

Interview

Interview with Mick McCann, Author of 'Nailed: Digital Stalking in Leeds.'

by Lesley Jackson

Deputy Editor Lesley Jackson talks to Mick McCann, local self-published author and Bowie fan. After reading his novel 'Nailed', one wouldn't blame him for not being a fan of West Yorkshire police though...



Local Leeds author Mick McCann jokingly claims to be, "Armley's eighth most successful author." But judging by his recent novel 'Nailed', as reviewed in the last edition of Art Fist, we would beg to differ. He must be top of the tree in Armley and with the success of his self-published novels, deserves more recognition around the city of Leeds as a cutting-edge author writing about our favourite city. Since publishing his first novel a couple of years ago, 'Coming Out as a Bowie Fan' and the more recent 'Nailed', Mick certainly cites Leeds as a strong influence. "Leeds has been extremely important to my first two books, it's a city I know very well, it's where my roots are; my old Dad used to say that he knew Leeds like the back of his hand, I feel like that. It's not so much the physical make-up and geography of the city; it's the people, the attitudes, good and bad. I hope the knowledge allows me to create a realistic portrayal of people and situations and I hope it gives my books an atmosphere and edge."

However, when talking of literary influences, Mick has some strong and interesting views on cer-

Interview

tain areas of the publishing industry. "I think trying to find your own voice is crucial, good or bad. Having said all that, I suppose everything you read has an influence, whether it's things you like or things you don't like. I'm certainly as influenced by things I hate as things I like; my first novel, although gritty and 'streety', I wanted to have a backbone of optimism, a positive, humorous, light outlook. That was definitely a response to all the tales of childhood abuse and hardship that seemed so trendy at the time and that I hate, they were and are so formulaic, they've even got a standard cover design. I hate writing by numbers, like all the football hooligan books, I hate them. They are usually cynically and commercially commissioned to fill a niche, they know that they'll sell a certain number to supporters of certain clubs and also pick up people who follow the genre. They are clichéd bollocks, you could take any of them and just switch the names of the clubs and they'd read the same."

Going Solo in the World of Publishing

So far, Armley Press, Mick's self-publishing venture has published three books. Rather than go down the traditional route of sending out his manuscript to agents and publishers, only to have them idle in a large pile until someone decides to take a punt on his work, Mick rather bravely decided to publish his, and a friend's, own work. Mick talks about why he took this decision, as well as some advice for anyone else going down this route. "Impatience, a lack of energy and living through the punk/post-punk era of independent, DIY music making. I mentioned that I've published three books, the second was a fantastic novel called *Hot Knife* by John Lake. John had a London agent who was hawking the novel around publishers, many of whom loved it but were unwilling to take a risk on an 'unknown'. I decided that I couldn't expend the amount of time, energy and frustration going down that route. I'd heard of print-on-demand and the way it was revolutionising publishing, I researched it and decided to take that route. The fact that the books would be available on Amazon was the clincher.

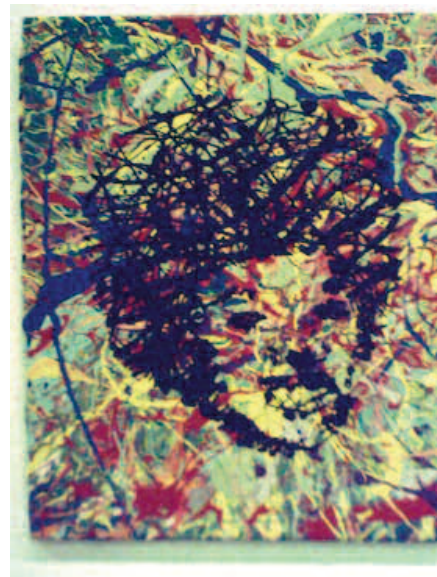
Self-publishing depends on having some spare cash. I'd say go print-on-demand and, if you don't want to spend lots of money, avoid the middle-man sites. These places will charge you a couple of grand to do things that you will easily be able to do yourself, so find a genuine print-on-demand company. The two major issues are cover design and layout/formatting, which the middle-men sites will charge you an additional amount for. For the cover design, if you know Photoshop, or know someone who does, you can do it yourself; the layout can be done in Word but needs to go through an Adobe filter. But I'm fortunate enough to have friends that can do this sort of stuff very easily.

Another advantage of print on demand is low margins and no need to carry stock, it's a 'just in time' model. When the books started selling on Amazon they stocked copies. As the copies sell they simply order more which then get printed up and delivered, I don't even see them."

The Story behind Nailed

For anyone who has read 'Nailed', and judging by the reviews on Amazon, plenty of people have, you will notice that the main character is also called Mick McCann and you would be correct in thinking that there is a lot of fact in this thrilling piece of fiction. Mick explains where the truth ends and the story starts; "Well, obviously, our son wasn't kidnapped, so everything that is directly connected to that didn't happen but there is no point in the book where it's pure fiction. All the material up to and including the arrest is as accurate as I could have written it and happened in

Artists' Showcase



Michael Jackson Pollock,
by Jon Cronshaw



Creature
by Carla De Azevedo



Scirocco (Part One),
by Karim Hetherington

Artists' Showcase

The Gallery.

Interview



Foucault Guessing Game,
by Amy Goring



Horse Scared by a Rabbit
by Thomas Boucher



Get Born in the Modern Age
by Katie Brown

the real world. I didn't include the fact that we were out on bail for two months until we proved our innocence because it's at some point in that two month period that I take the novel off into fiction. I include our suspicions and theories on why we were really arrested, which we could never prove, but believe to be true. All our 'evidence' is presented.

I am quite hot-headed, for example the road-rage incidents (other than the one towards the end) are accurate, and I suppose I'm also a bit self-obsessed and get wrapped up in bullshit. But there is a difference, I hope. I didn't want to create a Bruce Willis character, someone who the reader simply empathises with, but a flawed character, a real person who could react irrationally under pressure and wouldn't necessarily carry the reader's sympathy. I created a Mick character who was a bit unbalanced and dropped in a couple of clues that opens the novel up to a completely different reading. The story we are being told may not be an accurate account and there may be a completely different story that is only lightly implied. So I didn't try to draw an accurate self-portrait but obviously there's going to be a lot of me in there.



As for the police, had we had the money we would have certainly pursued or at least investigated a case against West Yorkshire Police but that's how our system works isn't it? Poor, less educated people are more likely to get criminalised; rich people are more likely to get away with things. I suppose we're halfway between the two, we were able to deal with the problem but had we been Prince Harry, or very affluent, we certainly wouldn't have been arrested. In the fiction I tried to present the police sympathetically, other than dismissing one of Mick's random, crack-pot theories as crack-pot when it turned out to be true. It would have been too easy and predictable to paint the police, as a whole, as being bad."

In the Pipeline...

For the future and from the frantic pace of Nailed Mick tells us what further writing plans he has, "I was writing something else before the events and intrigues that led to Nailed developed. So at some point I'll properly return to that, it's mapped out in my head and I've written some of it, but I'm in no hurry, the book needs time. Nailed was written in a six week frenzy while I was working through the day and doing all the childcare and domestic stuff. I'd snatch little bits of time while cooking tea or running the bath but mainly I'd write it into the night and morning, till 3 or 4 and having to get up a few hours later with the kids. Part of that frenzy fed into the book and it was right for that book but the next book is completely different, it needs calm time and consideration. I don't have a chunk of time so it'll happen when it happens, I'm in no rush."

Many thanks for your time Mick, and please, if you feel the need to hurry your next book, we at Art Fist will be waiting to read it!

Lesley Jackson in conversation with...

Wintermute



Deputy Editor Lesley Jackson catches up with the drummer of Leeds' hottest band, Wintermute, and chats with Ben Johnson about rock socks, 'Robot Works' and why moody performers are just no fun.

Wintermute, apparently, is a very common name in America. It is also the name for an artificial intelligence in William Gibson's 1984 cyber punk novel 'Neuromancer' and of course, the name of one of the best bands currently playing in Leeds. I was a bit of a latecomer to Wintermute, I didn't see them until 2007 at a gig in the now deceased Dr Wu's in Call Lane, but I remember being riveted right from the start. Although they may be associated with the indie genre, they are much more than a youthful dirge and a miserable lead singer; quite the opposite in fact. Their live performances are energetic affairs with lead vocalist, Dan Howard, keeping the audience well entertained with a strong, lyrical voice, jerky guitar and the rest of the band following suit as they lose themselves and the audience in their lively and bouncy performances. I asked Ben about the thinking behind performing live:

"It annoys me slightly when bands go out of their way to look bored and moody on stage. OK, I understand if it suits the music, for example Interpol, then it works; but for me, there's nothing more exciting than watching a band who actually look like they're into it and having a good time. Being in a band and playing the sort of gigs we get to play is such an awesome opportunity, you might as well rock out and have a laugh with it. I think this kind of energy feeds off the band and into the audience and if you're watching four guys having a laugh and throwing themselves about, then you're going to be more connected to your performance. Our music has a lot of energy and pop to it anyway so most of the time we just can't help ourselves!"

New Single

'Dead or Not He was Wearing Sunglasses' is Wintermute's latest single and is among a list of songs with a curious name, such as 'Gambling or Playing Cards' and 'Shark vs E-boat'. Ben told Art Fist where the song titles came from and recording their forthcoming album 'Robot Works'.

"The song name is one of Dan's, I think it's from a book, wherever it's from it's pretty funny. We try to come up with titles that are either absurd, in-jokes or just plain silly. We had a song called 'Sex Mistake' for a while, but we decided to change it at the last minute... which was probably for the best. Robot Works is 12 songs, played quite straight like we do live with a couple of little niceties

added for texture. It was all recorded live and it sounds like a live record when I hear it. It's obviously been well produced, but considering that the complete length of time it's taken us to do it, from recording, mixing and mastering, it's only taken us around two weeks, which is quite something in this day and age. I reckon it's better for it though, the record has a lot of urgency and energy, which is what we try to aim for when we play live. James Kenosha produced this in two stages, we did six tracks in the beginning of 2008 and we added the rest a year later. But it all fits snugly together like a warm rock sock."

Leeds is Top for Music

Wintermute were formed and still reside in Leeds. Ben, Dan and Dave met at Leeds University, "lived together in the first year, formed a band and rocked out. Chris, our bass player, came through an advert and now I can't remember a time when I didn't know him." With the current outpouring of music from Leeds, with some bands hitting the big time such as The Kaiser Chiefs and The Pigeon Detectives, Ben talks about the importance of Leeds both to Wintermute and how it is currently influencing British music:

"It's everything, it's not just the great music scene, but it's also where our home is and where all of our friends are. There's a mutual encouragement and appreciation amongst bands which other cities don't seem to share. I think it's this sole reason why the media keep turning to Leeds over recent years, and why it's become the most musically fertile city in the world right now. It's not just Kaisers and Pigeons anymore, this year you'll see Dinosaur Pile Up, Pulled Apart by Horses, Gramantics and Sky Larkin get really big, and being good mates with these bands makes the whole thing even more affective. I'm finding it hard to open up a national music magazine or newspaper at the moment and not see our friends in there. It's brilliant! Leeds has a fantastic DIY ethic, it's a place where anyone can decide to put on a gig at somewhere like Brudenell or Packhorse and at a reasonable rate, get friends to help out with artwork, drop flyers off, post on local forums, set up Myspace and Facebook accounts all off their own back. The constant stream of students means that the creative and aspirational side of the city is constantly thriving with new, young and talented people."

Rocking Out Full Time

So after the album launch, playing at Leeds festival described by Ben as, "absolutely glorious" and "bloody mental", what is in store for Wintermute now? Any chance of giving up the day jobs and becoming rock gods full time?

"That's a luxury only afforded to a lucky few. I think if the band can reach a position of touring Europe and further afield then we'd probably sell our own mothers to do that, and obviously that would take a much stronger commitment. Playing live and rocking out with friends is the best thing about being in a band, so to do that for a living, well, it beats just about anything else I can think of. The album is out in April; we're going to tour it around the UK, and then Ireland in May; there's talk of some European gigs in June and July and then hopefully do the festival circuits. It's all exciting stuff. Every year seems to be a fresh start for this band and I'm quite excited to see where 2009 takes us."

To find out more about Wintermute and follow their gig schedule, visit their website at: www.myspace.com/wintermuteband