

Comment and Features
Unwelcome in America

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The Durham Bubble

"He considered himself a romantic - on bad nights, a hopeless one; on good nights, a new one."

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mostlyharmless

durham's latest satire and comment
issue 5, michaelmas 2007

UP THE HILL

- University announces drastic move as part of 2020 Vision
- Castle to follow Palace Green Library and Old Shire Hall



Durham Castle, stone-by-stone, on its way up the hill

Durham University authorities have announced plans to relocate the city's medieval castle two miles south to a mysterious area known only as 'The Hill.' The move, which was revealed yesterday by sexual health spokesperson and sometime treasurer Emily Dukakis, is being undertaken in line with the University's '2020 Vision' for the city.

The relocation of the castle will not only increase the number of attractive buildings on the hill to one, but will also alleviate the university's chronic shortage of construction materials for new building projects.

One such project, a 30-foot high statue of former Vice-Chancellor Kenneth Calman signing a title deed, has created such a demand for stone that Old Shire Hall, Old Elvet and Palace Green Library are all to be sold, broken up and moved to 'The Hill' to be used in the project.

Vice-Chancellor Christopher 'Just call me Chris' Higgins said: "There's been a lot of tiresome blathering from the media about my view of students as a pesky nuisance who get in the way of the real process of governance. Codswallop. I may not have asked

any of them where they want the castle to be, but so what? No-one even noticed when I sold Palace Green Library. Anyway, those feral beasts at Palatinat are only here for a couple of years a piece. I'm here for the long haul."

The DSU's President, Flo Herbert, told MH that she was delighted at the news, describing it as: "just the sort of flagship project that student union presidents were born to disagree with. I might even organise a march."

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BROWN 'BIG STRONG AND BRAVE'

- Prime Minister to embark on 'courage' tour

Matt Brown

It was announced today that Gordon Brown will be embarking on a tour of the country to prove his bravery. The move has come in response to accusations that the Labour leader 'bottled it,' failing to call an election two weeks ago.

To show his courage, the Prime Minister will be engaging in sword swallowing, midget wrestling, fire walking and knife juggling in locations across the nation, whilst simultaneously sporting a deeply unsettling smile. 'Opposition' party, the 'Conservatives,' officially derided



"Bring it, Dave"

the event as "a circus," but Brown denied the allegations. "It's more of a funfair," he said in a statement.

GIRL IMPREGNATED BY LOVESHACK JACUZZI

Rachel Rutty

Durham student Fiona Hammelsbinworth yesterday declared herself "shocked" after she gave birth to twins in Elvet Riverside 142 during a lecture on social policy.



Tub of love

"I'd been putting a bit of weight on over the holidays, but I'd thought nothing of it. Then at 2:30 yesterday it dawned on me - it was nine months ago precisely that I went on that night to Love Shack," she said. Fiona, who is now resting in college, is the fifth female student to be impregnated by the Love Shack Jacuzzi this year.

All the babies are growing nicely, with the eldest already able to sing most of the words to the latest Pussycat Dolls and Mika numbers. The first, Michelle, is said to be "pleased as punch" at Fiona's births, and is currently designing maternity stash. "Ten more members and we'll have a society," she cooed.

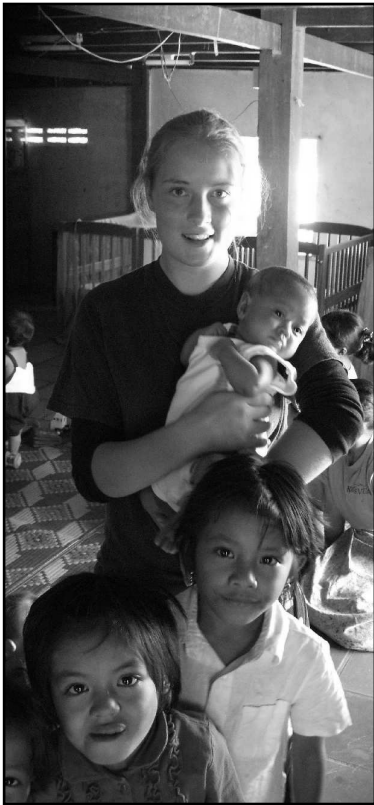
Community Service?

Siddharth Khajuria

Durham University administrators want Gap Year students to put their new found skills to good use in some of England's most deprived areas. So, whether you've been well-digging in Dhaka or teaching kids in Karachi, you'll be able to use your experiences to make a difference to County Durham's worst.

The ever-helpful University Security Office has compiled a list of its five top-tips for aspiring volunteers:

1. Do not pick up children of a different colour, photograph them, and upload the pictures to your Facebook album. You will be arrested.
2. Do not attempt to establish a charitable foundation to alleviate



the region's "acute poverty". There are no delicatessens in Peterlee. Get over it.

3. Do not suggest to five year old Timothy's mother that it would be a good idea for your family to adopt him and provide him a hearty, home-counties upbringing. It will not be appreciated.
4. Do not try to use your TEFL qualification in Stockton. It will be neither necessary nor helpful in the North-East.
5. Do not bother sending group emails to all your friends about what an enlightening and rewarding time you're having helping all these children from another world. You actually do live in the North-East. It's not a nightmare, nor is it a long-haul flight away. You'll see all your friends in the bar that evening.

News in Brief

MENTAL ASYLUM TORY SCAPEGOATS

SEEKERS! Officials have expressed concerns over mounting numbers of asylum seekers, in response to a recent report showing that the nation's mental institutions are reaching full capacity. "I just don't understand it," said leading psychiatrist Ernest Perkins. "Most of these Zimbabweans seem perfectly sane to me." **TW**

SLOVAKIA "DONE"

A Durham student is to stand trial this week, facing accusations of having 'done' a country over the summer. Cyril Rhodes, who did not wish to be named, has denied the allegations, claiming in his defence that Slovakia was "asking for it."

Mr Rhodes stated: "She'd done herself up all nicely with inexpensive transport routes and backpacker hostels - what else was I supposed to think?" The case continues. **TW**

In local political news, Durham MP Roberta Blackman-Woods has again denied reports that she has independent opinions, stating such scurrilous accusations were due to "Eighteen years of Tory underinvestment". **KK**

O.J. Blamed for 9/11

Evidence has come to the attention of MH suggesting the involvement of O.J. Simpson in the 9/11 attacks. O.J. denies any involvement, although he is set to publish a new book: "If I were an international terrorist with a stick-on beard." **ST**

KEEP THE CAP

Durham Students' Union have launched a 'Keep the Cap' campaign, amid mounting fears that the protection it offers students is in danger of being lost altogether.

"Removing the cap could cause an STD epidemic in Durham," commented a passer-by. **CW**

CHANCELLOR BRYSON CAUGHT INTERFERING WITH USTINOV

William G. Pilgrim

University officials are this morning reeling from reports that Durham University Chancellor, Bill Bryson (55) has been caught interfering with the remains of his predecessor, Peter Ustinov.

The unauthorized exhumation is believed to have taken place at around 1am yesterday morning at the site of Ustinov's burial in Geneva, Switzerland.

One eye witness described with horror the sight of "a stocky, ginger man carrying the skeletal remains of Sir Peter Ustinov through the streets of Geneva before conducting what can only be described as a D.I.Y post-mortem on the steps of St. Peter's Cathedral".

Upon his arrest, Bryson gave the following statement: "Surveys show that there is overwhelming support for the concept of organ donations and that more than 90 per cent of us would

be glad to know that our organs were being used to help others after our own deaths. Ustinov didn't donate his organs - I'm merely righting a terrible wrong".

Police officials described Bryson's visible disappointment at the state of Ustinov's remains: He had hoped to harvest Ustinov's organs for donation but found little more than dust and bones (and one of those funny hats, a bit like the ones people wear when they graduate).

The news comes as a blow to Durham University executives, who are presently celebrating the 10th consecutive year of reductions in contact hours for students.

Vice Chancellor, Professor Chris Higgins commented: "Here we are working our arses off so that freshers have more time to laze about and less time actually doing anything remotely educational, and then that Bryson goes and fucks everything up! When senior

university officials get caught digging graves it really distracts the students' attention from the good work we are doing: like cutting contact hours, de-cluttering the overstocked library and investing the money we save in offshore bank accounts".

Oli, Bryson's friend, declined to comment.

There is intense speculation as to whether this slapdash necropsy is the work of a babbling loon or a cunning and selfless promotional stunt. Bryson, who was born in Des Moines, Iowa, had told his wife that he was "just popping out for some milk".

It is believed that a deal was brokered between the US and Swiss governments by which Bryson will escape prosecution but will, in return, be forced to act as a 'UN envoy for quips and witticisms'.

NB: Donate your organs. Who knows where/who Bryson will strike next? Sign up at: <http://www.uktransplant.org.uk>



HELLO.

Welcome to another year of MostlyHarmless. For those of you that haven't seen an issue before, you'll have figured out by now that we try to be a mix of irreverent satire and comment. We're open to most styles of writing, about pretty much anything you can literally or metaphorically shake a stick at. If you want to get involved, drop us an email.

We've also got a mildly diverting website which includes new material on our regularly updated blog and an archive of all our previous editions at www.mostly-harmless.org.uk.

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DUS: "We don't do Politics"

In an attempt to purge the university's oldest institution from the clutches of rampantly entrenched conservatism, reforming President Mr Ewan Chapwoman has recently banned all references to political parties, the EU, or his own personal hero, Norman Tebbit. Chapwoman, a fiercely patriotic cheap-cava-and-a-TV-dinner-socialist, has accordingly altered his upcoming program of debates to include the intriguing 'This House believes that cuddles are nice' and the controversial 'This House voted for

Gough not Ramprakash in Strictly Come Dancing.' MostlyHarmless promises to cover further exciting developments in the fitter, happier and more productive DUS. **MT**



The Peasant and the Posh

Violet E. Bott

In response to worrying reports of spontaneity in this year's freshers' week social activity, the DSU has been forced to publish a student code of conduct handbook aimed at assuring conformity throughout the university. Although the guide is still in its early stages, MH has been able to secure a sneak preview (by pinching it off Flo Herbert's desk.)

"DSU Social Handbook: *a guide to assure safe and productive fresher interaction:*

Learn this mantra, and repeat daily: "There are local pubs, and rah restaurants and never the twain shall meet."

Upon fresher meetings there are only two acceptable

answers to the ever present school comparison.

Option A. Smugly spell out that your education was STATE. This will transform you into a hardy under-dog of cool. For extra points, try to out-manoeuvre your colleague by hyping up your grinding poverty.

Option B. Casually drop in the fact that your learning was PRIVATE. In this case, a lengthy comparison of Debrett's surnames is the most effective response.

In the unlikely event that private and state interlock, *keep calm.* The world will not implode because of an ill-chosen scarf or trainer. Breathe deeply and do some appropriate feet shifting. Some choice ill-at-ease platitudes should cover you to the nearest exit."

Durham College proposes second papal visit

Matt Brown

The 'famous' Hatfield College of Durham University has expressed interest in reopening communications with the Vatican through the new Pope. The last Hatfield visit to Rome ended in an unexpected and offensive pronouncement by the leader of the Catholic community. "We thought he would be pleased to see us," a spokesman mused, "but instead of welcoming us as pilgrims to the Vatican, His Holiness chose to ask us to 'fuck off.' We thought this a little out of character."

Reports from the meeting suggest that the former pontiff explained his reasoning through the

medium of song, repeatedly asking aides: "who the fuck are Hatfield College?" This remains the official Vatican stance on the college.

"Due to papal infallibility, I'm afraid that the line from our end has to remain 'fuck off,'" a Vatican official explained. "However, we would like to assure individual Hatfield College members that whilst the Catholic Church does not know who the fuck they are, God Almighty does. Now fuck off".

The new Pope, Benedict XVI, has made no comment on the prospect of re-establishing links with the venerable college. He has been too busy arm-wrestling Islamic leaders to prove his God is the real God.

FROM THE WEBSITE...

Visit www.mostly-harmless.org.uk for further irreverent humour, cutting edge comment and further forays into a world that is only ever *mostly* harmless. Articles include:

Fuck Bush?: 'Student journalists all want to be taken seriously. So do I, for that matter.'

Bring it on Fatboy: 'Let's take on that smarmy bastard now, grind his flabby posh face into the dust and teach the boy a lesson. No one fucks with Gordon.'

Britain Under Siege again! 'You fellow-travelling do-gooder Islamofascist-apologists know who you are. And I know who you are too'.

Fathoming Trout Mask Replica: 'This is not good enough', my sub-subconscious tells my subconscious, which belches loudly to my conscious: 'Take heed'. And so, on a sunny afternoon... I made it my mission to find out about Captain Beefheart, and to try to get my head round Trout Mask Replica, his most notorious album.

Also, Features including a look into the American campaign trail and Radio 1's Mary Anne Hobbs talking to MH about slavery, Durham's commercial drive, Ricky Gervais and much more besides.

The "one" and only

Will Shanks

Chesney Hawkes was forced to sing 'I am the One and Only' eleven times at a recent concert in the DSU, as a series of developments around Durham suggest that student obsessions with cheese, frivolity and faux-irony have taken a turn for the nasty.

Despite Hawkes' intention to play a varied set of songs from his rich musical catalogue, the crowd of music aficionados were determined that the singer should only perform his number-one hit, 'I am the One and Only'. Any attempts made by the singer to play different songs were greeted by booing, jeering and even specific threats of violence from certain members of the audience.

In the end, a visibly shaken Hawkes performed the song nine times (before doing so twice more as an encore). "I don't understand it," said Chesney, "Why would students demand such mindless repetitiveness in their music? One kid said he'd cut me if I played anything unfamiliar or that took itself seriously as music."

As the performance began to fall apart (Hawkes clearly choking on the suddenly bitter irony of such lyrics as "ain't nobody I'd rather be"), quick-thinking venue managers played recordings of 'Sweet Child o' Mine' and the theme from Baywatch to distract the audience as the shell-shocked Chesney was bundled off stage.

This incident only seems to confirm fears, which arose after a troubled freshers' week, that Durham students' love affair with the cheesy and ironical has gone too far. Not only does it seem that adherence



to a vacuous culture of novelty music and faux-ironic appreciation of low-brow television is the only route to social acceptance, but that failure to bear the symbols of this culture invites sinister persecution.

The vandalism of a fresher's room in Van Mildert has been widely attributed to the fact that he was the only one on his corridor not to have a 'Super-Ted' poster.

A worrying phenomenon, certainly, but not one limited to first

years. Faced with a student population increasingly turned-off by any semblance of artistic worth, the leaders of Hild-Bede chapel choir admit that for many years they have felt obliged to use less and less religious music and perform more self-consciously frivolous pieces, such as the theme-tune to 'The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air'. With the Neighbours society already the largest club in Durham, it seems the message to other societies is: 'Get Ironic or Get Out.'

Northern Cock

Anton Lazarus

Traders at Durham Indoor Market have been shocked by the news of an imminent collapse of Northern Cock. Explosive issues have left the company in a sticky situation following failure to grow in the former premises of the Loft Nightclub, Durham.

Events climaxed late last night, as local residents were aroused by plans to erect on North Road. Members of the planning department were quickly blamed for going soft with residents group leader Dick Hardon ejaculating: "I don't want this coming to my city - not in my face!" Hardon's stamina though will be tested by the firm when they move to courting next month in an attempt to beat him off.

A premature reaction has lead to severe disappointment for

half of steak-holders. This has been blamed on a combination of failure to harden in any niche and a risqué expansion policy, both set in a formally uncontrollable growth-area that has now begun to subside. Northern Cock CEO Willy Strain maintains faith in a "permanent swelling," but also made clear the possibility that "assistance could be sought from the Wank of England". The disappointment in being unable to keep it up has undoubtedly undermined the firm's long term aim of growth down south.



Bryson 'Happy'

Mr William Bryson, Chancellor of the University of Durham, yesterday pronounced himself to be 'happy as Larry' and 'full of the joys of October.' The precise source of this veritable barrage of unrestrained



jollity is unknown. It is believed to have occurred immediately after Bill had passed a particularly pleasant morning in which he ate a boiled egg and made several amusing quips about haddock. These were immediately snapped up by his ever-present entourage of student journalists, and are due to be hastily published in an 'I love Bryson' collectors' edition of Palatinate. **MT**

Features and Comment

Hail the Tin-Pot Dictator

How I learnt to stop worrying and love the Mugabes and Castros of this world

Magnus Taylor

For some reason I have a strange and perverse affection for Robert Mugabe. I know that he is what might be termed 'a murdering communist bastard.' I am aware that he is in great part culpable for the economic collapse of his native Zimbabwe, and I accept the fact that he is probably insane. However, I happen to like a rebel. Mugabe may be destroying his country, but he has always acted in a way that says 'fuck you' to a hostile world. I respect this impulse.

Back in the 1960s, Mugabe was hailed a revolutionary savior after he successfully fought the entrenched white racists who ruled this black man's country. Bob's popularity may have declined a little in the intervening years, but I have a sneaking suspicion that there is an enduring respect for him amongst other post-colonial African leaders.

On his day, Mugabe can be belligerently perceptive, a mad Marxist who just occasionally hits the spot. He once proclaimed: 'Isn't it obvious that Britain, under the regime of Tony Blair, has ceased to respect the charter of the United Nations?' Quite possibly, Bob, but you're not supposed to mention it. Mugabe consistently and fearlessly points the finger back at his former colonial oppressor. 'So, Blair, keep your England, and let me keep my Zimbabwe'. He may not be Zimbabwe's answer to Nelson Mandela, but you can't deny that the man has balls.

Another leader to gain my enduring respect is Fidel Castro, who has without doubt achieved the



pinnacle of dictatorial impishness. Not only has he been in power for nearly 50 years, but he has achieved this less than 100 miles from Uncle Sam's doorstep. Like Mugabe, he also did quite a few nasty things when he was younger, but, as you should have guessed by now, this is something I'm prepared to temporarily overlook.

Fidel is a survivor and a fighter, and, best of all, he sports a fantastically exuberant beard. It is almost as if he has grown it specifically to stick two fingers up to the clean cut politics of Americanism. He may unashamedly run Cuba through a personality cult, but underneath its squeaky clean surface, US politics is no less rotten - just look at Nixon's Watergate scandal or Bush's first election 'victory.' Whilst Castro proudly proclaims the socialist message, bedecked in his military uniform, projecting the image of the perpetual revolutionary, more conventional politicians repeatedly stutter platitudes concerning freedom and democracy and then use these flimsy concepts as justification for almost any dubious foreign policy aim.

As the opening years of the

21st century rapidly spin by, we witness the steady decline of some of humanity's greatest revolutionary autocrats. Mugabe has dug himself a hole that even his fiery rhetoric cannot help him escape and Fidel is succumbing to the inevitable passage of time. But fear not - there may still be some hope. Castro's great South American protégé Hugo Chavez of Venezuela looks to be flying the flag for the league of eccentric dictators. He began his reign in fine style through a combination of democratic elections, land re-appropriation and fierce anti-Americanism. Chavez, having recently passing a law allowing him to rule by decree for a year, seems to have read the Dictator's Handbook with great care. Even better, he appears for several hours daily on state television, presenting its flagship program !Hola Presidente! He's a sort of benevolent Venezuelan big brother, espousing the delights of home grown coffee and housing reform in one easy-to-digest daytime bonanza. Lovely stuff, Hugo.

Living under a dictator may for many be no laughing matter, but it frustrates me that little is generally understood of the origins of such regimes. Dictatorship is a product of political, social and economic instability. Men like Mugabe and Castro didn't appear out of nowhere - they were created by their environment. When dealing with such figures, it is largely unhelpful to instigate a policy of ostracism and political condescension. With figures like Chavez, we still have time to bring about productive and healthy relations. However, for any leader with socialist leanings, even daring to ask an awkward question is enough to turn them into a megalomaniacal monster in the eyes of the international community. This instinct is completely counterproductive, and in the long run will only create more isolated and desperate Mugabes, all intent on doing exactly what the hell they want.

Freshers Fair Game?

Anton Lazarus

Roll up, roll up! Come one, come all, enjoy the freebie-filled, CV-filling, multi-national bank-fuelled DSU Freshers' Fair! Come closer, you batch of Oxbridge rejects and excited comprehensive-schooled immigrants, and mingle with the keenest members of the never-ending list of Durham societies, from JewSoc to JihadSoc.

You can feel the enthusiasm in the air. So many opportunities to enrich oneself with extra curricular activities... Was I just helping those disabled kids so I could put it on my UCAS form? No! I will change the world! Head over to the Student Community Action (SCA) stall and sign up to be dribbled on by some of the North East's least pleasant toddlers. Think how good that'll look on the CV.

Because, let's face it, this is what the Freshers' Fair is really here for. We all came to University feeling a little unsure of ourselves - it's impossible not to when you're forced to re-cast and re-present a personal image from scratch. So, it's all too tempting to join the CV-building process while you're still in those first few bewildering days, and when you speak to those further up the hierarchy, joining becomes all the more seductive. "I joined Tiddlywinks Club in just the same position as you are now, and look at me - a year later I'm Club President and I've made so many friends".

Durham Students' Union boasts that it has more student societies than any other university in the country. The variety, though, is beside the point - the underlying system is the same. Get involved. Work hard, run for election, become treasurer, social secretary or even see your name in lights in the ever-coveted role of President. Increase your work load for a year and then enter it on your CV in less than a hundred words.

Why? Because when you apply for that summer internship at

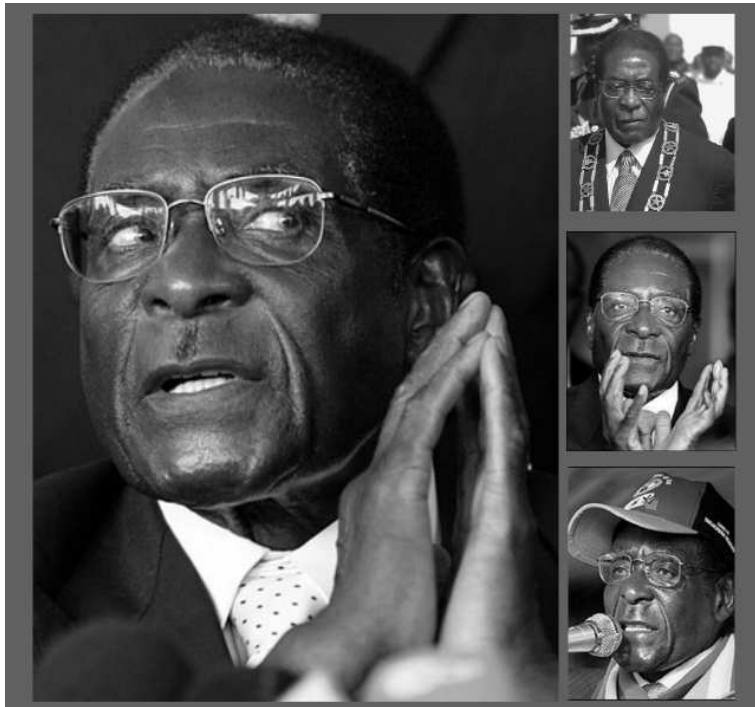
Deloitte, the fact that you reformed the accounting procedures in the Ultimate Frisbee Society will prove that you're an organised team player. As you desperately attempt to make yourself distinguishable from the other ladder-climbers in the ever-touted 'crowded graduate job market,' you become increasingly like a desperate contemporary artist, ascribing whatever meaning you think you can get away with to your activities.

Besides the lure of a small addition to a CV, every stall-holder at the Fair is also certain to aggressively champion the second reason to join a society is: "it's a great chance to meet like-minded people and make friends".

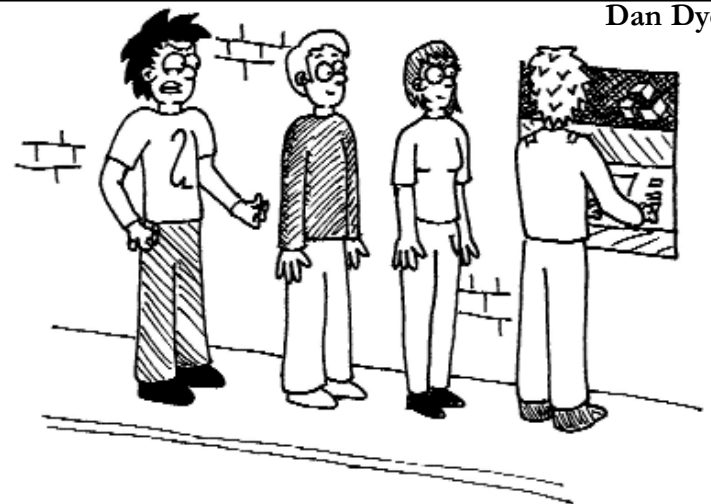
A premise based on two terrible assumptions: firstly, that you want to meet like-minded people and, secondly, that being in a society with them will lead to deep and meaningful friendships. Did we really come to university to meet people like us? Surely not. I, for one, wanted to meet different people who thought differently, believed different things and acted in a different way.

What one really needs to learn from University is simply the experience of having been here, of having played the game, just like everyone else. Maybe that will be joining a club (or even starting your own - you only need 30 members!), or maybe it will be sitting in your college bedroom and pissing in the sink. University and your education is what you make of it - it's not served up delicious and piping hot at the Freshers' Fair, it's the moves you've made while playing the game. In prene else, we're all aiming to be different.

Of course there is one other option; join MostlyHarmless, disagree with what all the editors think, not really make friends with any of them, write this article in a vague attempt to complain about the sad inevitability of life, then sleep easy, safe in the knowledge that it'll look great on the CV.



Dan Dyer



HAVING BEEN THROUGH REGISTRATION, DAVE FOUND HE NO LONGER HAD ANY PATIENCE FOR QUEUEING.

Welcome to America

A reflection on an encounter with U.S. Border Security

Siddharth Khajuria

A FEW WEEKS AGO, I took one of the daily Continental Airlines flights from Mexico City to Newark Liberty International Airport in New Jersey. Immigration in the United States has usually been little more than a case of, "passport?", "what's that purpose of your visit?" After 9/11, the collection of biometric data preceded the quick thud, thud, thud of the necessary documentation being rubber stamped. The process never lasted more than a few minutes.

This encounter started in a predictably similar fashion. No idle chatter from the officer, just the usual questioning delivered in the dry and superficially friendly tone. And then some new questions "Is this your first trip to the U.S.?" (fair enough, but you know from the fingerprints and photographs on your computer screen from my two post 9/11 trips that it isn't).

Then, "where were your parents born?"

"Sudan and India", I replied. A brief pause followed by a "Come with me, please."

This was new, and not a little worrying. But the Border Protection Officer's got a gun holstered to his waist and you want to holiday in his country - you don't ask questions.

I follow the man down a corridor, around a couple of turns and into an unmarked elevator. We don't exchange words. No explanation of our little trip is offered. The elevator doors open and we enter another section of the airport. In it are a hundred or so chairs and a handful of armed immigration officers. "Take a seat." I do.

My officer disappears; my passport and documentation lie in a plastic wallet behind a counter. There are four other characters in the room: A scruffy, elderly Latin American man and his wife; a young, sharply dressed Middle-Eastern gentleman; and, a couple of seats to my left, an unassuming American gentleman.

With my curiosity now accompanied by a hint of anger at the lack of justification or explanation offered thus far, I ask the man next to me if he has any idea as to what is going on.

"No idea, they haven't told me anything. I've been waiting here three hours, I've missed my connecting flight, and the next one's full."

This doesn't bode well. "Siddharth!" Another Border Protection Officer bellows my name from behind his desk. I approach him. The same questions: purpose of visit, previous visits, parents birthplaces. Same answers.

"Ok, sit down, I gotta do some stuff with a computer."

I do as I'm told, wondering what it is that he might be doing with his computer. In the meantime, another officer approaches the American man next to me, apologises for the wait, and suggests that he complain to his airline for not allowing enough time to clear Immigration & Customs. I want to suggest that it's patently ridiculous to suggest that airlines should be factoring three to four hours to get one's passport stamped, but considering that mine has not yet received any sort of stamp, I remain silent.

"Siddharth!" My name is called again, this time by another officer.

Though there are new, more worrying, questions. "What do you do?"

"I'm a student."
"What do you study?"
"History."
"Have you got any family in Pakistan?"
"No, they're primarily from India."
"What about the Middle East?"

"Well, my father and grandfather grew up there, so there are probably a few distant relatives scattered about, but none that I know."

"Hmm, have you ever been to Pakistan or the Middle East?"

"No." So what if I have?

"So, you haven't been to Syria or Iran, or places like that?"

"No." Again. Though I wander about the implications inherent in 'places like that'.

No more questions. She scribbles a few notes down on my form. Then, finally, thuds the entry permit stamp in my passport. "Enjoy your stay."

I most probably will. But the immigration procedure is hardly a friendly welcome to America that the Homeland Security poster promises. I hadn't shaved in a month and I share the skin colour of those who have committed many a terrorist atrocity. So I don't mind subjecting myself to the odd 'random' search at airport security or on the London Underground. But there's a harsh, almost fearsome, approach taken by the U.S. Border Security force. They don't tell you why they're taking you somewhere. They don't tell you why they're asking you questions with inherently prejudicial presumptions. And they show no remorse for presuming that you are a criminal until proven otherwise.

I leave the security area an hour later than my fellow passengers on the flight from Mexico City. My bag sits, alone, circling a carousel which has been all but emptied by those who weren't made to disclose parental birthplaces, travel histories, or the locations of their relatives.

Fair enough. There was probably no need to ask the 80 year Mexican grandmother who sat beside me if she had been to Pakistan recently. But the tone with which I was interviewed, and the utter lack of justification offered for the extra interrogation I was subjected to left a bitter taste in the mouth. The paranoia and insecurity of the present climate are perfectly understandable, but there is a value (and decency) in treating your guests as friends until you know that they're not.

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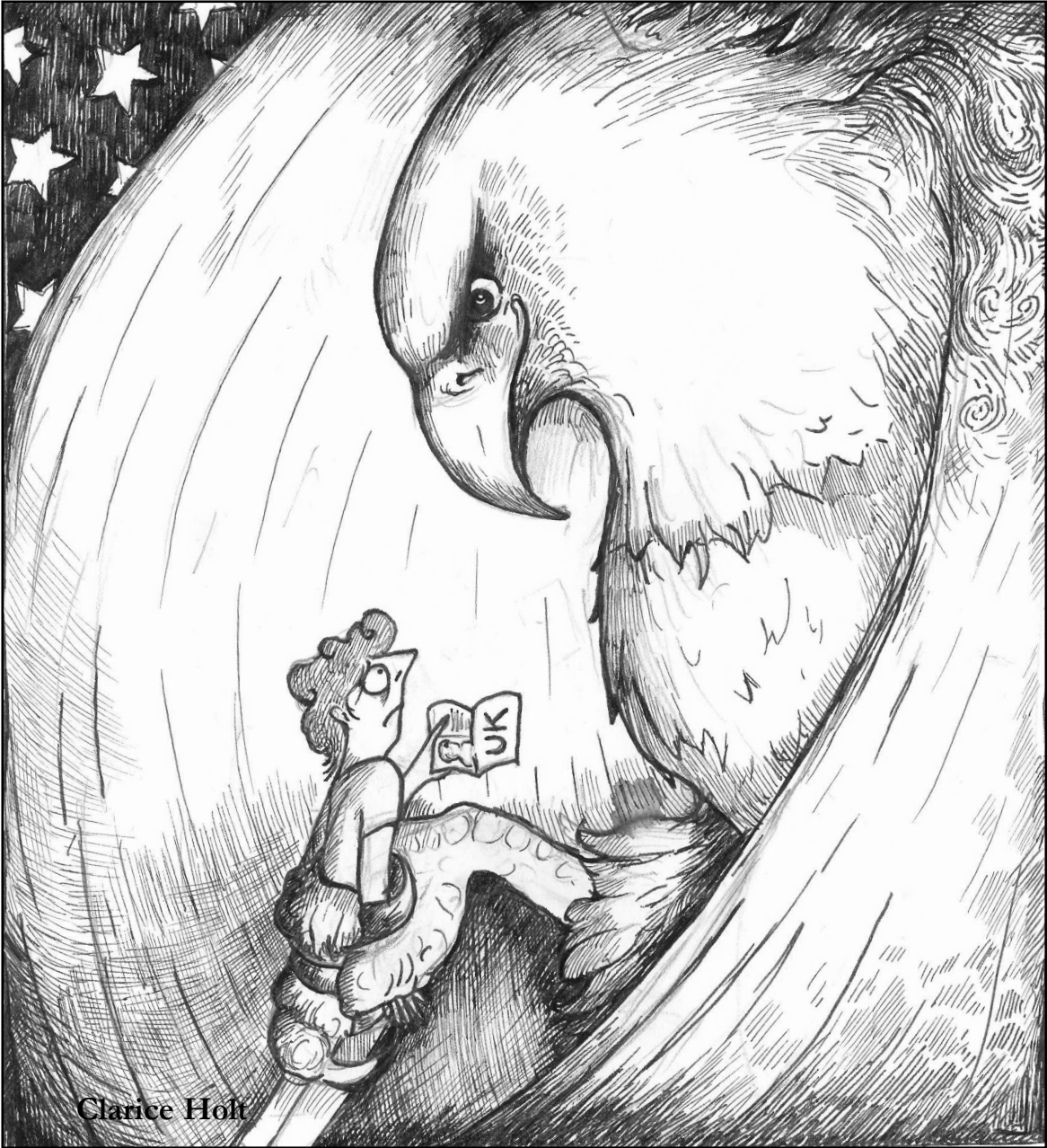
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Anyone who's ever seen the funny side of suffering, despair, and Klute (and who hasn't?) or who's ever wanted to write about evil subjects in a humorous fashion, or humorous subjects in an evil fashion, this is your chance.

Next term the glorious, glamorous Cabaret of Evil will be hitting the Assembly Rooms stage. We're looking for sketches, songs, monologues, any kind of routine that might be sufficiently sophisticated and wicked. The show will be as varied as possible, any style of writing or topic that you think is relevant will be considered.

All submissions, enquiries etc. to Rob Henderson at r.s.henderson@durham.ac.uk.



Clarice Holt

10 Reasons for Students to shop at...

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Money Talks

Is there any effective representation of the Durham student voice as the University gradually seeks to compete with national rivals?

Siddharth Khajuria

University Treasurer Paulina Lubacz has recently announced plans to create a "Landmark Visitor Centre for the World Heritage Site, probably in Palace Green Library." If carried out, the plans will see Palace Green facilities shifted to "suitable alternative locations."

The plans form part of Durham's '2020 Vision' which looks to "maintain student numbers living in the city centre," whilst also protecting local community interests through enforcing "proper strategies" for the location and management of student properties. Indeed, the plans sound perfectly reasonable in the abstract. What do they entail though? Proper strategies? For whom? Protect local communities? Which ones? The students or the permanent residents?

The University is at a crossroads, attempting to strike a balance between its traditional feel and the competitive advantages of a gradual departure up the hill. The sale of one of the University's more beautiful buildings, Palace Green Library, would seemingly fall into the latter. It fits a pattern of progressive abandonment of the City Centre by Durham University, following last year's move of the Politics Department from Old Elvet, as well as the proposed sale of Old Shire Hall.

These moves are certainly sure to generate significant revenue, but at some stage, administrators must surely question what makes Durham's student population choose this University over its rival campus alternatives, like York or Warwick?

The long term development proposals are couched

in the language of 'consultation' and 'careful planning.' But the process will invariably be weighted against the voice of Durham's transient student population. Each of us is here for a mere three or four years. '2020 Vision' sets its sights on a Durham thirteen years from now.

Long-term thinking surely makes sense. But at present, there's no effective representation of the student voice to rival that of the local residents or the Vice-Chancellor. DSU Presidents are around for a fleeting year. The journalists who write these articles will swiftly disappear onto projects far away from Durham. University students lack any real stake in changes that won't see fruition until years from now.

The camera-clad day-tripper will appreciate their visitor centre. The local population will



Palace Green Library to make way for Visitor Centre?

appreciate their money. But who can properly represent the University's 10,000 students - all of whom will soon be paying upwards of £3,000 for the privilege of a Durham education?

The administrators, the local residents, the accountants: each have their own ideas about what's best for Durham. What is being

forgotten is the students' unique insight into the nature of this university's experience, which is vital to the place's future. Right now, there's no effective way of making sure this voice is heard.

Sadly, it seems that in the absence of a Permanent Student Overlord, money talks.

Subotica's Stein

MH's Sam Toolan meets Ben Stein, the man behind Subotica

Sam Toolan

It is the end of June 2007, and the frenzied exam period of May is now just another docile memory. After three weeks of languid lie-ins, liquid lunches and lost evenings in Lloyd's, I leave my pit and make my way to the DSU in search of Ben Stein, promoter of this evening's dance music event, Subotica.

Stein - generally rather hairy - exudes a rare sort of patience that I quickly realise comes about through an unquestionable confidence in his ventures. He has been rather precocious in his grasp of the entrepreneurial. Growing up in Norfolk doesn't really strike me as the sort of place where there's much opportunity for concocting exciting club nights, but Ben assures me that his teeth have been well cut on booking some highly esteemed artists.

As we make our way outside, I get the opportunity to see Stein's patience in action. A group of people are huddled together in the entrance way discussing whether to go in to Subotica - which costs £8 - or to Loveshack - for £5. Stein politely interrupts and begins to explain what you get for that extra three quid. Do you realise, he asks, if you wanted to see Fabio and Grooverider in any other club in any other town in the country, it would cost you about twenty quid? These guys are the fathers of drum n' bass. They'll be playing some really powerful and challenging music. What are you gonna get in

Loveshack? Kylie Minogue or The Spice Girls and overpriced booze...

Watching this process take place is illuminating. Unfortunately for Stein, the cynic in me is correct about one thing: his words are falling on deaf ears. While the music at his event is hugely more challenging and soulful, it is that age-old, ubiquitous



Ben Stein

allure of familiarity that will win. Your average Durham student cares not if she has to spend an extra three quid: she will be happy so long as she can just leap up and down clinging to her mates in a fuggy, soggy maelstrom.

Stein returns from his unsuccessful diatribe. He doesn't sigh and moan, he says, because he knows what he's up against. He chose to come to Durham - small, traditional, redbrick - because he saw potential here to help bring about something it didn't really have: a

proper nightlife. I chose drum n' bass, he says, because it's a genre that seems to appeal to a wide range of people. You can be talking to someone who listens to indie or pop, but they'll say that when they go out to a club they like to dance to D&B...

Just over two weeks ago Stein held another Subotica event. Shy FX was headlining but I was more interested in interviewing another artist, Radio One's Mary Ann Hobbs. Hobbs and I had met on a few occasions before and I was keen to grill her on how things had been since then and how other people in the industry were doing. What I didn't expect was that Mary Anne would talk so openly and deeply about some very challenging and poignant issues. You can find the interview in full on the MH website site, but, in brief, among other things, we talked about slavery and its relationship to Black Music.

It was a pleasure to talk to Mary Ann about such things, and it encapsulates what Stein's trying to do. There's definitely a didactic element. He's trying to show the average Durham student, who could so easily drift through life firmly strapped in to their comfort blanket, that the world has a great deal more to offer.

For those of you that would prefer to get shitfaced in the Shack to Chesney Hawkes, well, good for you. I'll no doubt see you in there from time to time myself. But I will be putting that on hold when Subotica appears. Keep an eye out!

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Dining out with Lamoney

Resident food critic Marten Lamoney ventures into Durham's La Spaghattata

Marten Lamoney

There's a rule of thumb, (perhaps you've heard it?), to which everyone accustomed to dining out in a foreign city refers. This slice of received wisdom advises that if there is a large percentage of locals amongst regular gourmands then the place is probably a safe bet for authentic and affordable nosh. However, this barometer usually only works when the food served is indigenous to that region.

La Spaghattata is an Italian Restaurant in Durham City Centre, just a few thousand miles North-West of Napoli.

And as your man from London slouched beneath the green, arched portico entrance (a shade too emerald for authenticity,) having ascended several appetite-building staircases, he caught a pleasingly pungent whiff of garlic, and an earful of equally pungent Geordie murmur. This boded well according to the aforementioned rule.

Sheepishly aware that a table for one was hardly economic use of the intimate, not to say cramped, restaurant's space, I quietly corrected "Per uno, grazzi" to the waiter's importunate "for two?" I was ushered sympathetically to my single table, with its tasteful Sunflower motif tablecloth (a refreshing change from the typical red and white Gingham often used by most such places in an attempt to ape Italian simplicity.)

Seated, I opted for a glass of the tangy yet quaffable house red, and I warmed to the artificial Adriatic atmosphere; the excitable staccatto chorus of local voices, the endearingly unconvincing "Roman exposed brick-work," and most impressive of all the slick, efficient, fortissimo staff, strutting here and there, congregating briefly to confer on a plan of action, and delivering

Cucina with hands as quick as Carlo Cudicini's. If I suspended my disbelief, which a dash of vino rosso often helps, I could have sworn I'd been transported to the Pensione Betrolini.

I opted for the Margherita (a money-saving student measure,) yet needn't have because the pizzas are molto cheapo, rangin from £4.90 to £6.00. I waited for little more than five minutes, marinating, before my pizza arrived. The Pizza may not have conformed to the strict, not to say fascistic, standards elaborated in the Italian Bill of Parliament (yes, really!) introduced in the last decade which dictates that only pizzas produced from quality ingredients, via certain approved methods may be called "Jus' like a momma used to make," ahem, I mean: "traditional Italian pizzas," but the mozzarella was delectable if a tad too chewy and the tomato was satisfactorily sharp.

So, yet another pseudo-bistro or a bustling enclave of Italy tucked away above Durham's cobbled streets? More the latter, because although certain superficial details miss the mark, the zeal with which the air is infused is unmistakably Mediterranean.



Watch closely and you might even witness an usually undemonstrative local, suddenly possessed by Italian spirit, flail his hands erratically whilst talking (but don't look too closely because he might just be spoiling for a fight....)



Transfer Window Found



Alaric Green

This week a shocking darker side of football has been revealed. The Lord Stevens' investigation into the state of football transfers in this country has uncovered the startling existence of an actual transfer window.

Lord Stevens, an advocate of the use of clichés in football, describes the window as "about two feet by four feet, hinged at the side and with poorly painted white frames". The exact location said window is on the ground floor of FA Headquarters, Soho Square in London, round the back by the dustbins and Faria Alam's 'office'.

Stevens explained that

certain players have been seen simply climbing through this transfer window rather than changing clubs in the usual manner. In the basement of FA headquarters, where all football players are kept, some unscrupulous agents pointed out that the transfer window had been left ajar, and many players promptly made their escape from their previous registration with rubbish clubs. CCTV footage from the alley shows Fernando Torres darting through the window and hailing a cab to Liverpool, Emile Heskey getting stuck in the window, and Sven Goran Eriksson having sex with 4 different women.

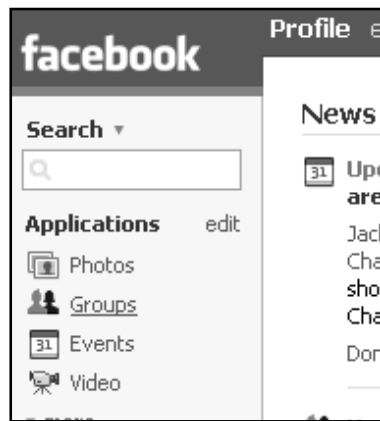
Average Barristers Found

Andrew Tickell

A seeped internal report we stole from the Compartment of Made in Alesbury has discovered that average to poor barristers do exist. Flying in the face of hundreds of years of legal tradition, the top secret report, exclusively reported in Mostly Harmless today reveals that classification of all barristers as 'top' inevitably results in no bottom, and tends to mislead the public and

distort competition. Figures in the legal establishment quickly distanced themselves from this finding, however. Top barrister Sir Humphrey Waxleft IQ, a Bencher in Grey's Anatomy, commented: "any attempt by the Executive branch to foist narrow egalitarian notions of merit upon the legal profession threatens the golden thread running through the lamp of British justice since the Magna Carta juries."

Facebook without Life



A small part of the population spiralled into chaos yesterday as the Life Server was temporarily shut down. Once the Life Server was up and running again and things had calmed down a bit, a consensus quickly emerged that Facebook really wouldn't be the same without Life.

In other news, James Bridgewater updated his profile. He edited his about me section and profile picture. **ST**

Nightline in TV Fears

Durham Nightline has reported that a number of freshers have been left feeling lonely and socially excluded because they never watched television whilst growing up. As a result they are unable to take part in discussions on children's TV shows: the sole topic of conversation amongst freshers.

"It's like they're members of a cult that I never joined," said one anonymous first year from St Aidan's. "The thing is, I don't even think 'Button Moon' or 'The Magic Roundabout' were on during our childhood - I think they are reminiscing about the repeats!" **WS**

Thatcher named as suspect in disappearance case

Ron Pecorry

Former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher has been named as a formal suspect in one of Britain's most high-profile disappearance cases. Despite 300 months of searching, there is still no sign of Britain's lost manufacturing base, and recently uncovered evidence points the finger at Thatcher.

The story was broken by Carey Hunt of The Mardale Times, after he learned that British Special Branch officers had uncovered traces of a vibrant economy in the trunk of a ministerial Jaguar, used during Thatcher's reign in the 1980s.

Thatcher had been put in charge of the economy in 1979 and all seemed to be going smoothly until a few short months later, when national assets were sold back to the public in numerous share scams, public spending was confined to the London area and Scotland was Poll-Taxed as a punishment for voting for the Labor Party. It was during this time that the manufacturing base disappeared.



Thatcher, shown here with PM Gordon Brown, remains unrepentant and plans to use her long-standing defense of whining and surrounding herself with spineless sycophants who will do very nicely out of the whole sorry debacle.

Hella-Vision

Television's latest venture, Channel 4+7



Maria Namgana

At a time when confidence in TV is at an all-time low, two budding entrepreneurs, Bagpuss Nailer and Sodoff Malaria, have a vision to restore your faith. Channel 4+7, to be broadcast 24/7, on Channel 11, will be the first foray into terrestrial television since Channel 5 belly-flopped onto our screens years ago.

Although not in any way affiliated with Channel 4, the broadcasters hope to ride bareback on the current advertising campaign for 'Channel 4 + 1' and entice viewers who are either partially sighted or so illiterate that they cannot differentiate between the numbers 1 and 7.

"We're quietly confident", said Bagpuss, "because even if we

don't pull in the dim-witted, blind crowd that we're expecting there's always the people that accidentally press 1 twice".

In the fight for ratings, Malaria hopes to "mop up the morons that tune in to catch up on their favourite 'Channel 4' shows 7 hours later when they're channel surfing after realising that 'Bus Pass Boob Jobs' isn't actually on."

The most expensive of the new shows will be 'Honors', a 237-part series about moderately attractive-in-a-booksmart-kind-of-way- until-they-take-their-glasses-off-and-then-you-cum Durham University based students from all types of social backgrounds - from Hatfield to John Snow - discovering they have special powers and delving deep into their mysterious pasts. Will

they graduate with a first? Will they ever be rescued? Will the world end before they can put a stop to it? Will they ever be rescued? And how is the fat guy still fat?

The daytime schedule is not currently finalised but leaked internal memos that we have got our sticky little mitts on suggest that the channel will not sacrifice cost in its quest for low quality programming. In a message entitled 'Sex Sells', Nailer writes:

"...so if we just flash up words like ERECTION and HANDJOB and put a countdown on the bottom of the screen, people will keep watching 'til it runs out. Then we can play nine minutes of adverts, by the end of which everyone will have forgotten what they were waiting for..."

Lohan versus Duff

Cordelia Graham

Little in life upsets me - I can deal no problem with world debt, global warming and the war in Iraq; but perpetually, the war in my heart between Hilary Duff and Lindsay Lohan disturbs me.

Some might say 'why not love both?' but I, like any other self-respecting lover of "tween" culture, can, and will not commit myself to this. Their rivalry is so strong that to swear allegiance to both would be like declaring myself a Nazi Communist. A love for Aaron Carter would tear any friendship, let alone acquaintance apart. Thus every day tears me apart in having to reject one or the other.

Due to her unexpected appearance in my life whilst living in

Siberia, I favoured Hilary for years. Her heartfelt melodies and feel-good films won me over. Admittedly, I was left somewhat suspicious of her character's assertion that she preferred a 'Big Mac' to a salad in 'A Cinderella Story,' and even more so when her love interest declared that he preferred a girl "with a good appetite." But I could never deny that Lizzie McGuire's soothing asides have nurtured me steadily through my formative years: they've picked me up when I've been low, and her assured-yet subtle attitude has given me inspiration in countless moments of crisis.

Happy I was until the day Lindsay Lohan stormed into my life. She was everything that Hilary was not - rock n' roll, just so.....sassy; pure

filth. I felt that all my life I'd been asleep but was now awake and on fire, burning aflame with the love of Lindsay's auburn locks and talented teen roles. Of course she had always been an icon for my twelve-year-old self, aware of her greatness in 'The Parent Trap.' But now she had grown into a strong, untamed force - ready to be harnessed in catchy, yet under-publicised pop songs and sassy teen flicks.

What to do with muses two? I try not to think about it, so consumed I am by internal division. All I can do is look to the vision of the Olsen twins - different yet equal in honour - and cling to the hope that one day, in the bounteous future, Lindsay and Hilary will be teen idols together.

The Diary of Esther Rudolph

It's the beginning of term and Jonathan, Alistair and I have moved into a new block of flats. Entirely populated by girls. Seven flats of three. Twenty-one girls. And me. According to Sophie Badrick, who says I'm incapable of embracing my sensual inner womanhood because I refuse to go to pole-dancing lessons in Newcastle with her, twenty-one and a half girls.

But yet again, I've managed to land myself a flat-share with boys, so for another year, I have to make sure I'm fully clothed before I even venture out of my bedroom to go to the loo, just like I'll have to do when I'm living in the old folk's home. If you can't wander around and make a Marmite sandwich in your pants in your own home, then tell me Mr Locke, what is the meaning of private property?

But twenty-one girls! Jonathan and Alistair keep eyeing me suspiciously. For three days I've been trying to convince them that the tap water isn't going to decimate their sperm counts with abnormally high levels of oestrogen. The building doesn't have its own sodding water table, but the boys will still only drink cartons of pop, and Alistair is becoming a handful and has poured yoghurt all over the telly in a Ribena-fuelled episode.

Still, they have a point. Twenty-one and a half girls. What if we all start menstruating at the same time? Every third week of the month will be like Apocalypse Now! Alistair will have to install a panic

room. Jonathan, having slept with half the girls in the building last year, will have to move to Orkney. What a lovely way to move into a new building - "Hello, I'm your new neighbour. My flatmate fell asleep on top of you last february. Here's a basket of fruit." Ouah! Bloody Jonathan, going around, pre-emptively destroying all my female friendships with his...

I just wish his womanising was a bit less... urgent. Every morning of freshers' week has been like a grim carnival in our living room, a different girl in Jonathan's yachting t-shirt, eating my bloody Shreddies, and Alistair going to increasingly bizarre lengths to entertain her. If you're going to do that with the promotional mini fridge, fine, but don't come crying to me when it rips the skin off your leg. Today it's Kirsty, 18, from Kingston-Upon-Hull (likes: Razorlight and disrupting other people's household routines by hanging around the living room, dislikes: macaroni cheese). "Why don't you have a house party?" she says through a mouthful of Shreddies, gazing down thoughtfully at what appears to be a pair of my comfort socks on her feet. "Sounds like a great idea!" chimes Alistair. "Neat plan, guys!" calls Jonathan from the bathroom. Thanks a bunch, Kirsty. And from forth the vile bowels of hell on ghastrly steeds emerged the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse - Death, Famine, Pestilence, and House Party.

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North Road Loft Conversion

Tom Walker

Durham's new lap-dancing club is struggling to get its feet off the ground. Well-placed sources suggest that the nightclub has only received three visitors since being granted a license in August. Two of these were a pair of rather puzzled Jehovah's witnesses.

An exclusive BluLov poll has revealed a lack of enthusiasm among local residents about the new venue. Respondents suggested that the sight of naked flesh was no great

novelty in the North East. "Why (ay) should I pay for that?" asked Saul Gascoigne, of Chester-le-Street. "I heard they've got lasses in there with skirts as long as 3 inches, like." North Road's obligatory lack-of-a-dress-code looks set to scupper the club's progress.

With the present influx of students into the small city, however, the Loft's prospects appear somewhat brighter. Male students are expected to flock to the venue, visibly salivating at the prospect of catching sight of a female neck *sans* pashmina.

Blair Tries His Best

Anthony Blair is a pretty straight forward sort of a guy. Not only did he recently triumph in a poll to find 'the best PM of the 1990s', but he has always vehemently proclaimed that he has always 'done what he thought was right.' Big deal Tony, why don't you go and draw me a lovely picture of all

the things you thought you got right. Remember to use lots of red to fully convey the blood and flames swamping Iraq and Afghanistan. There are some points in life when you can't get away with just 'trying your best..' MT

Prole Art Threat

A painting has been removed from the Baltic Art Gallery in Gateshead after being accused of being 'conducive for the development of independent thought.' Police Superintendent Bob Langham stated: 'if we let every Tom, Dick and Harry look at such filth, it'll only be a matter of time before the North East is

swamped by a veritable plague of madly copulating paedos.' In a further development, 600 copies of Nabokov's 'Lolita' have been thrown into the North Sea, as the authorities attempt to purge all traces of artistic expression from County Durham. MT

Gore wins award

William G. Pilgrim

Just days after winning this year's Nobel Peace Prize, Al Gore is celebrating after being awarded first place in September's Match of the



Day's Goal of the Month competition.

BBC executives have been criticized for politicizing the Corporation and the game of football itself. The decision has raised concerns centred around the BBC's 'flexible' definition of what constitutes a 'goal'. Gore is said to be "elated." His wife, Tipper Gore, has expressed concern that they may be running out of room on the mantle-piece.

Ladbrokes have Gore at 2/1 to win 'Best Newcomer' at next year's MOBO awards.

Was the Serpent a Paedophile?

Sam Toolan

Before university, I was encouraged by my teachers at school to take a gap year abroad so I decided to go to America. I did all sorts of exciting things with lots of other charming young people, but I think the best thing was going to the Creation Evidence Museum in Texas. While I was there I was lucky enough to attend a free lecture called, Was the Serpent a Paedophile?

This seemed like a strange question to me. When I was a child I used to go to church every Sunday with my parents so I knew a bit about the Bible and that sort of stuff. My understanding was that the crafty serpent managed to trick Eve into biting into a forbidden apple, and that led to Adam and Eve's fall from Grace and all that. Yes, but I didn't remember anything about the serpent being a paedophile.

The lecturer – a very thin red-faced man wearing a long raincoat and thick glasses – started by saying a prayer, thanking Almighty God for granting us freedom from tyranny and sin. Then he asked the audience, "so, was the serpent a paedophile?"

Now I knew this was one of those rhetorical questions so I said nothing, but some people at the front of the auditorium murmured, "yes he was!" The lecturer smiled at this. "To those of you with any doubt," he said, "I'd like to start with the words themselves."

"Now we all know what the word serpent means don't we ladies and gentlemen? That's right: it means a snake. But, sometimes words have other meanings, and in this case, that's important."

"Now serpent comes from the Latin word, *serpere*, which means to creep. Creep is another way of saying steal, as in to steal a child's innocence, and that's exactly what a paedophile does, isn't it?" Now a larger part of the audience made encouraging sounds of affirmation,

and the lecturer continued.

"But, what about the word paedophile ladies and gentlemen? It's a big word isn't it? It's made up of three syllables, and the middle one is "do". Isn't this the exact noise Homer Simpson makes when he makes a mistake? And Homer's named after a famous ancient Greek poet. The ancient Greeks believed that there were lots of gods, so they were obviously strange, and it was a big part of their culture for older men to pick out their favourite young boys. Need I go on?" By this point sighs of disgust from the crowd filled the hall, and the lecturer licked his lips with glee.

"Now then," he said, raising his right arm above his right shoulder to quieten the audience, "shall we have a look and see what the good book says about this?" To the enthusiasm of the audience he began flicking through the Bible until he found the correct page. "Now then, Genesis 3." He began to read.

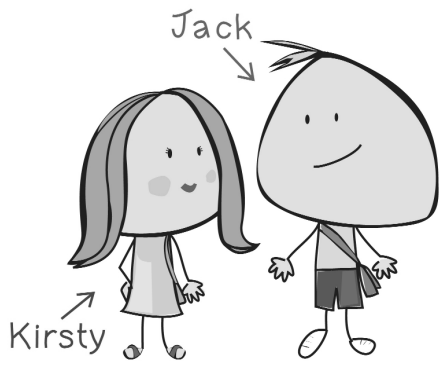
"The serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals..." Well, we know how crafty

these paedophiles can be, don't we? Using the Internet to find their victims. I mean look at the name of one of the biggest companies! Apple!

"God knows," says the serpent to Eve, 'that when you eat the forbidden fruit your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' Well, do we want our children to know evil, ladies and gentlemen? We do not! We must keep these evil serpents away from them!

"Now, ladies and gentlemen, have you heard of a writer called John Milton?" "Yes sir! Oh yes!" they cried. "He wrote a long poem about the serpent called Paradise Lost. It's a disgusting piece of writing. Milton feels sorry for the serpent. Can you believe it folks? He thought the serpent had had a hard life! And did you know that Milton was blind? That's right, and because of this he made his poor young daughter listen to his filth and write it down for him. Milton is just one example of many who were clearly paedophiles, just like the serpent they all loved!"





Jack

Kirsty

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Dan Dyer

MH Short Story//The Durham Bubble

Donnchaidh O’Connail

Pip had not only never considered it possible, he had never even considered it at all. Yet here he was - literally, in the Hatfield bar, and metaphorically, in a quandary. It was the latter which exercised his thoughts, of course - no one in the Hatfield bar ever wants to think about being there. Philip Sidney, a man not often given over to perplexity, was forced to admit that perplexity had him in its clammy grasp. It was a new - and uncomfortably moist - experience.

“He conceived of his love life in indie terms - low sales, little crossover appeal, but critically acclaimed”

Pip was dependently wealthy. Extremely so (wealthy, not dependent). His father owned a stately home, a frigate, two Poets Laureate, and Devon. Pip would affectionately refer to him as 'the poor one'. His father would laugh and shoot something feathered, preferably a bird. For all this, Pip had avoided the worst excesses of his upbringing. Ostentatious displays of privilege were not for him. He enjoyed eccentricity, fine wines and beautiful women, sometimes in the one night, but no more so than any other part-time student and full-time bohemian. He considered himself a romantic - on bad nights, a hopeless one; on good nights, a new one. His passion for the arts was genuine, a product perhaps of his mother's fascination with still life paintings of corpses. He had ticked all the boxes of Durham's artistic elite - directing plays, writing poetry, cavorting on stage in a dress which fitted him alarmingly well. He conceived of his love life in indie terms - low sales, little crossover appeal, but critically acclaimed and maintaining his integrity. All he needed was to meet a girl with the right combination of Gauloises, Oxfam couture and Sufjan Stevens.

One might say that Pip had spent his entire life preparing for his time in the Durham Bubble. The home counties background, the gap year spent rebuilding ancient temples in Cambodia, the career guidance teacher who had urged him to "follow his heart" - all could be seen as a preamble to The Best Years Of His Life. How hollow it all seemed now.

He could pinpoint the moment where he began to realise that something was very wrong. It was all the fault of that wretched road trip he had insisted on undertaking -

hitchhiking north after the Easter holidays. On the return journey, the last driver had dropped him off a few miles outside Durham. To Pip, it might as well have been the dark side of the moon. He scurried to the nearest hostelry to drown his terrors with a quick glass of something liquid and medicinal.

Pub. Interior. Darkness, illuminated only by electric light. Old men nursing the pints they had started in 1957.

He ordered his drink.

"Long way from home." (It was the barman who said this, obviously.)

"If you will grant me licence to slightly alter Tennyson's words... 'In the springtime a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of revision'.

grant you..."

"You serious?"

Pip blinked at him. "I am like an actor simultaneously playing parts written by Oscar Wilde and Mickey Spillane - in deadly earnest."

The barman beckoned one of the old men, who turned to them with the speed of an oak tree laying down rings.

"Jack, this lad says he's at Durham University."

"Durham... University? What's that?"

"No idea. Next he'll be telling me they have a university in Bishop Auckland. Or Stockton."

The old man had a fit of slow-motion giggles, which sounded like he was choking very gently.

"So what d'you study at this

that it's real, and fool someone into going to it, and see how long we can fool them!"

A pause, while this suggestion was digested.

"Are you suggesting... a polytechnic?"

"No, no... we need a challenge... a grand old university, with traditions and codes and all the rest of it..."

"Like Oxford or Cambridge?"

"Well, yes, but let's not get carried away. How about we make it... the third-oldest, third-poshest, third most prestigious university in England? We'll set it in some historical town in the middle of nowhere, invent a history going back generations, with, I don't know, inter-collegiate rivalry

students would live in a castle, just like in Harry Potter."

"Let's give them a debating society full of loud and confident but ultimately deeply shallow and unworthy individuals. And a vibrant yet cliquey theatre scene."

"And a light opera group. We can't forget light opera. What institution of higher learning would be complete without it?"

A pause.

"Who will we send there?"

Another pause.

"Where's Pip?"

"He went to change his socks. He was wearing the one pair."

Another pause. Glances exchanged. Nods of agreement all around.

He confirmed his suspicions by interrogating one of his friends, Jake, an ectomorph from just to the south of Peter Kay, whom Pip reckoned was most likely to divulge whatever the secret was. Sure enough, Jake cracked like a walnut in the grip of a standard walnut-cracking implement. Pip, struggling to believe him, went further. He knocked on doors, called in favours, wasted a good deal of time on Facebook, but eventually found what he had most dreaded discovering: his life was a lie, or at least a very misleading version of the truth. Durham University, the entire institution around which his life revolved, had been created as a prank played on him by his friends.

Pip swirled his drink in his glass and his options in his mind. He could tell his parents, but guessed that they would be none too impressed to learn that their money had been wasted on an elaborate jape. They had given him those funds to fritter away on drink and cannabis in a real university, not some pseudo-academy. He could always try to start another degree somewhere else, but Pip was a young man in a hurry, anxious to get his degree out of the way and commence the long drift through his aimless twenties.

Suddenly, an obnoxious Union Society exec member sitting two tables away keeled over and died. This was the most enjoyable thing to have ever happened in the Hatfield bar. Pip took it as a sign. If his entire life was someone else's idea of a joke, why not play along? After all, his friends had clearly gone to great trouble to construct as ingenious a set-up as possible. Perhaps they had established Durham University as a reputable institution, whose non-existent credentials and worthless degrees were, through sheer force of ingenuity, actually worth something? Could they have been so thorough as to fool the entire world, with the exception of one tiny pit village? It was worth a shot.

Pip downed his drink and left. He was feeling strangely elated. He had the rest of the joke to look forward to.



Back up to uni after the holidays, don't you know?" (Correspondingly, this was Pip.)

"Whereabouts?"

"None other than that old town that is good old Durham town."

"Durham?" The barman paused. "I get it."

"Er... get what?"

"Durham... University. A joke. You made a joke."

"Well... the facilities aren't that great, I'll grant you, but I wouldn't go that far..."

"It's a drinking club? Bunch of you, up for the weekend, rent a house, go on a pub crawl..."

"Well, if by 'bunch of us' you mean several thousand, 'rent a house' you mean live in college halls or the Viaduct, and 'pub crawl' you mean... well, yes, but we do some study as well. It's not a bad university, Durham. Not quite Cambridge, I'll

University, anyway? Coal-mining? Hairdressing? A bloody big cathedral?"

Pip reckoned that this was neither the time nor the place to explain the concept of Combined Arts. Besides, he had bigger things to worry about.

Three summers ago, his school chums with whom he had smoked herbal cigarettes and drank Earl Grey and vodka (yes, together, since you ask), and had played cricket and garage rock with (not together - don't be silly), and had generally fooled around with (not in that way - Pip was bohemian, but not that bohemian), had been sitting bored stupid one afternoon, when someone had the bright idea of playing the best practical joke ever, in the history of practical jokes.

"Let's make a whole university, from scratch, and pretend

and nomenclature and practices that make no sense to anyone but the students, and..."

"Let's give them a debating society full of loud and confident but ultimately deeply shallow and unworthy individuals. And a vibrant yet cliquey theatre scene."

"Rowing. It has to have a strong tradition of rowing."

"And a castle. The best

The Back Page

Oh, what? This is news now, is it?

Charlotte Spencer-Smith

(Two cows.)

Cow 1: (Cheerful.) Hey.

Cow 2: (Flat.) Hey.

(Silence.)

1: Whatcha doing?

2: Oh, you know, cow things. I'm a cow. You're a cow. What else do we do apart from eat, and hang out, and lactate? I wish you'd stop asking me that - whatcha doing? What am I going to be doing? Watching Big Brother? Grilling a salmon steak?

1: (Hurt.) Hey, I was just asking.

2: Yeh, well don't. It's bovine. In fact, scratch that - I take issue with the word 'bovine'. Yes, I'm a cow, I'm stupid. I don't read Proust, I don't look like I'm reading Proust; let's not make a song and dance about it. Apart from cow number 45, who does actually read Proust.

1: Which one is she?

2: She's the one with a massive 45 branded into her arse, what do you think? Oh hang on, there's a bloke coming. (Flat.) Moo.

(Man walks past.)

1: MOOOOAAHHHH!

2: Moo. (Lights a cigarette.)

1: What are you doing?

2: I'm having a fag. I stand around in the rain 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, I eat grass, and if it's my lucky day, they'll put me in the pen to mate with Mitchell, who I think, frankly, is an idiot. If I want to have a smoke, I'll have a smoke. I don't care what the little label put on the packet by the government says. Am I

more likely to die of lung cancer from smoking or be shot in the head and have my skinned carcass farmed out to twelve different Angus Steak Houses?

1: (Shock.) They shoot you?

2: Oh, what? This is news now, is it?

1: I can't believe it! We've got to do something! I don't want to die! Oh my fucking god!

2: Well moo-fucking-hoo! What do you want me to do? Write to our local MP? Set up a parliamentary pressure group? Or maybe we should unite with all the animals on the farm and conspire against the humans to build an aeroplane out of little bits of tin and fly our way to freedom?

1: But Nick Park -

2: I've told you before and I'll tell you again. Nick Park is a clay moron.

1: But I've got so much to live for!

2: What? What have you got? Are you waiting til the end of the tax year to collect your P60? Is there a mortgage you need to pay off?

1: (Crying.) It's just such big news! Why do you have to be so harsh on me? You're just so mean! You always belittle me in front of everyone! I don't know what I've done to deserve this!

2: (Sympathetic.) Hey.... Hey there, little guy. (Cuddles 1.) I'm sorry. Look, I'm dealing with a lot of issues right now and I'm just taking my insecurities out on you. And it isn't fair. Are you alright?

(1 nods.)

2: Tell you what, I know what will make you feel better. Let's go down the bottom of the field and have a shit, yeh?

1: (Nodding.) Ok.

Lions.



I have them on my website.
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WORK WITH MOSTLYHARMLESS



MostlyHarmless was set up last year by a couple of second-year historians. The editors are all finalists and are looking for a number of people to get involved and take charge of the paper this year.

There's plenty of scope for getting involved at any level, be it copy-editing, designing, writing, sub-editing, cartooning, marketing, distribution or some sort of niche you manage to carve out for yourself.

If you're interested in doing anything, get in touch. Email, facebook, telephone, whatever. Stop the editors in the street if you know what they look like.

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