

Lune Fiction

Issue No 22

The Jungle of Calais



Lune Fiction Issue 22 (21st July 2009)

Lune Fiction - it's better to rock in hell than to roll in heaven.

The Jungle of Calais: A Christmas Tale

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Published by © Humble Texts

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All comments, advice, contributions and donations are more than welcome.

Messages that we receive will be upgraded to pure and blessed missives.

Dying is liking defecating: one has to do it on one's own.

ISSN 1754-7172

The next issue will be out in the late autumn..

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There is always a lighthouse out there in the dark - just be aware of the sirens beneath it.

JMdV



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(so pre-Raphaelite it's excruciating)



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& two rather interesting historical commentaries on well-known characters of Lancaster

Editorial

Dear Readers - my faithful companions, Ha! Who would have thought it? A new issue of Lune Fiction! And so soon after we had announced that there weren't any plans for a new one. Life, eh?

Actually, one should thank Grandmaster Mills of The Real Alternative radio show on Diversity FM for that. To put it bluntly: one day he approached me and said in no uncertain terms that it seemed a shame that Lune Fiction was currently producing nothing new (the words ****, **** and ***** were directed at my person).

This, the 22th, edition of Lune Fiction is a truly sincere publication - no faffing about, no literary incontinence and no verbal experimentation. But, of course, as always, this issue invites you to ponder life's rich pageant, existence's many and varied absurdities, the fickleness of fate, the majesty of farm animals and Zoltana Wilson's foul mouth.

Yes, Ms. Wilson is a new(ish) contributor whose distinctive take on some of Lancaster's distinguished historical figures is unique to say the least. But at least

she's open and honest.

The other contributors are me with some interesting observations on sheep and cows and Jomar de Vrind with a vivid description of a road trip he embarked on last Christmas. It's a non-fictional flash novel that is like, totally wired, man!

Far out.

So my dear associates and fellow farm-yard animals (and special greetings to the little woodland creatures who have at long last finished observing the Observer's observer and moved on to investigating the nine infernal circles - although worryingly they have become friends with one of the three beasties (but the little woodland creatures have always been proud animals)), I hope you devour this issue of LF totally and utterly and are left feeling replenished with literary joy. Good appetite, eat well and a good one,



Humble Sam

Letter to the Reader

Dear Being,

I compiled and edited this edition of LF with much affection and joy, but I don't see the point in you reading it.

Sincerely yours,

Humble Sam

Extended Flash Essay: Are sheep to blame for the disposition of the Swiss?

By a rambling (and humble) pig

People from abroad always get it wrong when they visit Switzerland. They consider the Swiss to be tenacious and straightforward talking but then they meet them at home and discover them to be stubborn and uncouth - just consider the Swiss People's Party's* initial reaction to the dethronement of Federal Councillor** Christoph Blocher a few years ago. Petulant children, even those out of Struwelpeter, are a model of maturity in comparison.

One could assume the Swiss' nature is caused by the massively intimidating Alps and the deep dark valleys that dominate the land. Or one might be lead to believe that the Swiss are a grumpy lot due to their diet of fresh meat, vegetables, fruit and fish as opposed to the safe, sanitised food (which are full of goodies such as antibiotics) that we enjoy in the West. But these are false assumptions, for I know that the Swiss are not the loving kind due to the lack of sheep in the great Swiss outdoors. When I ramble among the hills and woods surrounding Swiss cities and towns to admire the spectacular views, the first thing - indeed the only thing - that strikes me is the severe absence of sheep.

I regularly encounter a great number of Swiss brown cows (a breed of cattle called Swiss Brown in English - how original) but there are no sheep to be seen, none whatsoever. One could argue that a minor lack of ovine beasts has led the good folk of Switzerland to be a curmudgeonly and emotionally miserly sort of race. But no! The whole of Switzerland lacks sheep in seriously big numbers. Which explains why the hearts of the Swiss have turned cold and that they have chosen to find salvation in the Swiss People's Party,

Switzerland's answer to the Death Eaters.

Sheep are delightful creatures with fine woolly coats that roam the hills of Wales, Ireland, the West Country, Scotland and the North of England, where I live. I merely need to step out of my front door and within five minutes walking distance I can have a distinguished conversation with one of our fine woolly friends. Sheep are kind; sheep are divine. They bring a smile to children's faces, lie down with lions and provide us with lamb shanks and Irish stew. They bah sweetly and represent Christ on Earth. Actually, now that I think about it, humans are the flock of sheep and sheep are the lords of simple joys & pleasures who are helping us to achieve a nirvana of contentment which is why people dream of sheep.

Even androids.

But the Swiss don't dream of sheep. They dream of brown cows clumsily stumbling across Alpine meadows and leisurely laying cow pats for unwary ramblers (e.g. me) to step into.

In Switzerland, one walks out of the front door and one has to share one's inner thoughts with a Swiss Brown. They are beautiful creatures, but they are not stimulating company. They stare back at one with alluring brown eyes. Now, one could mistake these deep brown sparkling eyes for the wise eyes of a Zen master with his profound knowledge of the ways of the world, but only an ignoramus who has never met a sheep would commit such a heinous crime. Cows are empty vessels with a misleading exterior. They are as the hordes of Mara, the demon who tempts those seeking spiritual bliss and enlightenment with false promises by turning the mundane into the alluring.

And just as the Swiss are mislead by the alluring brown eyes of the Swiss Brown, so they have been mislead by the Swiss People's

* A party that makes Geert Wilders Freedom Party look benign and enlightened.

** A Swiss Secretary of State

Party and their ilk, who promote patriotism without warmth, homeliness without kindness and comfort without substance.

Incidentally, cows contribute to global warming. They do, after all, emit a large amount of methane through belching (but not flatulence, contrary to popular opinion). According to the UN, they are responsible for 18% of greenhouse gases. And they are aggressive. They have been known to butt and stamp on innocent ramblers in Great Britain. Then again that might have something to do with mad cow disease.

Most Swiss cities have rivers and lakes, which - although they contain no sheep whatsoever - can alleviate the false pretence of a Swiss Brown's skin deep benevolence. Sadly, bodies of water tend to merely deflect the true nature of things and even the citizens of, for example, the lakeside Geneva are no different to, say, the citizens of lake-less Bern.

Anyway, anyhow; I can confirm that in Switzerland there are virtually no sheep. And sheep really are the way forward, as they provide the public with genuine warmth. Of course, that is not to say that cows should be abolished. Far from it, for sheep without cows is like butter without bread, cream without strawberries or Dr Who without the Daleks. It is too much of a good thing really. A good mixture of cows and sheep (moitié/moitié as the Romands* would say) provides the public with woolly coats & brown eyes, warmth & beauty and lamb shanks & hamburgers. That is what is needed: an equal amount of cows and sheep grazing the green and pleasant meadows of Helvetia.

Of course, I don't know whether my interpretation of the Swiss' nature is correct and, naturally, I don't claim to be right when I say I have good reason to believe that the profound lack of sheep has lead the Swiss to be a cheerless race.

But I have been known not to be wrong.

Thomas Johnson of Lancaster

by Zoltana Wilson

His father was Christopher Johnson who was a popular 'child carer' in Lancaster, and his grandfather was massively into ultra violence too.

Thomas' father Christopher was orphaned at the age of 12.

Thomas Johnson was educated at the Old Girls' Grammar School and articled afterwards to Mr. Henry Gregson of the firm Gregson, Gregson and Gregson. Thomas practised sodomy in Market Street, Lancaster, for 50 years. For several years he was also berk to the Borough magistrates. Thomas Johnson eventually became the senior partner in the firm Johnson, Johnson, Johnson & Johnson.

Many people in Lancaster knew him and would often touch him. He had a kindness of spirit. He was a drunken clown for the sake of others and he worked for the devil. A great political man, a colossal drunk and a complete and utter violent sexual deviant, he wrote many exciting tracts on Northern sexual practices and 'animal husbandry with pigs'.

However, he was a devoutly religious kind of guy and he helped spiritual organisations including the Conservative Party. For many years he paid summer visits to the Island of Dogs. The everyday life of the plebes on the island found an interest in him. Never before had they come across such a tosser. When on the Isle of Dogs, he held bible classes. He died of the clap on the island in July 2001, a pervert's odyssey, and he is buried there. Forever. Thank God. Freak!

There is a monument to him on Moor Lane in Lancaster.

Zoltana Wilson © The Local Lancastrian Amateur Historical Society (Honorary President Ben Wallace)

* Romands for Switzerland are as Walloons for Belgium.

A Christmas Tale

Just like seagulls follow the trawler to fish for, er, fish, so Lancaster's pigeons follow the traveler (i.e. me) to deposit their waste onto me and my Kookaburra.

An appropriate metaphor for life I think.

I left my abode on Water Street at 11am on 23rd December with plenty of sandwiches, two litres of a mixture of coca cola, mineral water and cloudy lemonade, a packed rucksack with plenty of warm clothing and Albert Wild's ring on my right hand - Albert Wild being a Baltic refugee from Lenin's Soviet Union and a bit of a Nazi (but his daughter has got an impressive balcony and when I feel disheartened with life, I think of her amazing assets). Leaving home wasn't easy, for my fish were most distraught by my travel plans - indeed, one of them died of a broken heart a few months later - and our farewell was a tearful one. Okay, it was tearful on my behalf, as the fish chose to acknowledge my farewell by inspecting their favourite pebble.

And so I found myself walking up to the roundabout on South Road and then onwards towards Hala. I chose a lamppost as a good place to hitch a ride, before I quickly realised that a pigeon was perching on top having a good dump. Runny cream brown. By some miracle it failed to hit me, or my Kookaburra or my rucksack.

Phew.

I moved on, and five minutes later I was picked up by a pleasant Garstangian who took me all the way to the motorway exit where I spent an hour watching sheep doing not much, as sheep tend to do not much in the midst of winter. I also took up chain smoking while holding a piece of paper that simply said: 'South'.

Eventually Sean, a property developer and

green warrior from Lancaster, picked me up in his rather cool Mini Cooper and took me to a service station just outside of Coventry. We talked about this and we talked about that and we talked about developing property, town mapping, the student flats that he owns on Cable Street and the empty flats that no-one wants where the Navigation once was - may it rest in peace. We also talked about Dickie Branson and his trains - may he rot in hell.

Sean is an ecologically aware businessman whom I have mixed feelings about. Still, he drove me to Coventry which was a good thing. Actually, I was rather grateful.

I spent five minutes outside the service station before being picked up by an English trucker who lives in Portugal. He had a rather large amount of crackers and French blue cheese he insisted on sharing with me. Yum-yum!

The guy drove me to a service station halfway between Oxford and Milton Keynes and spoke a hybrid of Geordie and Cockney which made me think he was from Liverpool. That's the only time he got angry with me.

He was actually from Cleethorpes but spent a lot of time in London. He was a very nice chap. In a moronic trucker kinda way. Hey, he did pick me up after five minutes, so all I can say: result!

I proceeded to spend ten hours in Oxfordshire trying to hitch a ride. The thing was that I got dropped off at 5pm when it was getting dark, and it turned out that no-one was willing to pick up a hitchhiker after dark. In addition, the truckers I did approach for a ride were either willing to take me but going the wrong way, or they were going the right way but wouldn't take me along for insurance reasons - apparently if we were to be involved in an accident the insurance wouldn't cover me, as truckers are not allowed to

take hitchers with them these days. Fate, eh? While desperately trying to hitch a ride I finished my pop, ate several sandwiches, chain-smoked, had a not inconsiderable number of double espressos - I was, after all, hanging out at a petrol station with a 24 hour shop which had a coffee machine whose beverages were not too bad - became friends with a field mouse who was interested in the cheese that the trucker had given me and generally swung between despair and boredom.

But every state of misery must come to an end, and finally at 3 am on Xmas Eve, after ten hours of pain, misery and suffering in the outer circle of Dante's Inferno known as Oxfordshire, I spoke to a young trucker who was both going the right way AND was willing to take me along.

He took me to Croydon.

The Anonymous Soldier

The trip consisted of me catching snatches of sleep and having conversations about Radios 3, 4 and 2 and why people who ride push-bikes and mobility buggies (you know, those motorized wheelchairs for the elderly, the disabled and the lazy) should be shot (according to the young lad, they shouldn't be allowed on the roads as they don't pay road taxes... Laugh? I dreamt of Jeremy Clarkson!). Oh, the other thing, I would like to mention is that he was very young: early twenties I would venture to say. And he already had two kids. Blimey!

But he did take me all the way from the shire of Oxford to South London, and for that I was well and truly grateful. We arrived at six in the morning.

In Croydon there was a nonstop flow of traffic, and I was cautiously optimistic that it would take me merely a few minutes to hitch a ride.

I waited three hours.

His name was Steve, and he was very patient. By the time he stopped, I was merely going through the motions of trying to hitch a ride and had lost the will to live a long time ago. He honked his horn till I awoke out of my self-induced stupor and patiently waited for me to drag my body up to his car (a rather fanciful jaguar style Rover). I asked for a ride to Dover, and I dumped my body onto the passenger seat.

Steve was a seriously friendly sixth form teacher in Maidstone (where he was going to take me to). We laughed, we parled and we smoked. He was a very sophisticated cockney geezer who was well-travelled and well-mannered. His accent contradicted his demeanor. He also felt I sounded quite suave and was fairly sophisticated: a bit posh, if you like. Steve also felt that I should be a dean in Oxford or something. Do sophisticated people hitchhike at Xmas? And more to the point: shouldn't I do something with my life?

Steve dropped me off at Maidstone on the motorway entrance to Dover where I spent twenty five minutes pretending to hitch a ride whilst wondering whether I should just give up and call Pa and ask for forgiveness, and whether I could spend Xmas at his place with his kids and common law wife (emphasis on common there), but I stooped down to tie my shoes laces and a car stopped to take me to Dover.

He was an ex-squaddie with a very young kid in the back who lived in a rather picturesque Kentish village amidst rolling hills covered in vineyards (oh, how the times are changing: gone are all the hops and barleys of yesteryear, of my childhood... sniff!), and he needed to stay out of his wife's way, as it was Christmas Eve after all.

He drove us to his village, tanked up on diesel, told me about the many and varied vineyards around the place and then pro-

ceeded to drive me to Dover while junior was gurgling contently in the back. Bliss... three males bonding on Xmas Eve.

Dover: I hadn't been there for so many years. In fact, it had been over two decades since I had last driven there. We drove down the motorway among Kent's hills towards the White Cliffs and then came that glorious, infamous view. That one view in Great Britain which - just about - stands above the views from Ben Nevis, the Old Man of Coniston and Snowdonia: the view down to Dover, its castle and the White Cliffs. Yes, in twenty years nothing had changed - even the harbor was still more or less the same.

I thanked my driver and his toddler profusely, purchased a ferry ticket and smoked my last cigarette.

I still had a long way to go, my sister had started to text me asking where the hell I was, but it was good to hear people speaking Dutch and French again. I felt happy. I was also worried for my sister.

And I didn't have a penny on me to contact her.

I ate my last sandwich and proceeded to board the ferry for the seventy five minute journey. I tried to catch up on much required sleep, but while residing in the land of nod, a young man with a trendy Apple mobile phone chose to sit near me and after his phone had gone off once too often, I sat up upright, gave him a very cross look and asked if I could use his phone to call my sister, as her texts were getting more and more concerned - indeed she was beginning to sound somewhat agitated.

The young man gave me a bemused look and simply said 'Sure'. Olga, my sister, for some reason, wasn't picking up the phone so I left her a voice mail, thanked the lad and went back to sleep.

Bliss.

I got up five minutes before arriving, managed to get a few cigarettes off various Eastern European truckers crossing the Channel and noted diligently that it was just after 4pm when the ferry arrived in Calais on Xmas Eve.

I still had a long way to go.

Flanders

The problem with the Flemish town Calais, well the problem for me anyway, well, actually, the problem with Calais ferry port is that foot passengers go one way and cars, lorries and motorbikes go another way: straight onto the l'autoroute, the French motorway system. Bummer!

Oh yeah, and while we're at it: Dover ferry port looks new and trendy whereas Calais ferry port still looks like it was built just after the war.

But I digress.

I spent ninety minutes trying to hitch a ride, after, of course, adjusting to the fact that cars drive on the other side on the Continent, a fact I was reacquainted with by means of a car furiously beeping at me when I failed to see it while crossing the road as per usual. I wasted ninety minutes before discovering why there was hardly any traffic: the ferry spews out its cargo hold of cars who go straight onto the motorway. I did contemplate going up to the motorway and catching a ride there, but les flics, the French police, for whatever reason, were out in force that evening.

I was stuck. Apart from an old Dutch hippie, no-one had stopped. The elderly flower child had offered to take me to Flanders proper, but I declined as he really was going the wrong way.

So I was stuck. Stuck! Stuck, stuck, stuck in French Flanders on Xmas Eve. And it was getting dark, I had no cigarettes and... this is

where the story gets interesting.

While pitifully trying to get a ride near the entrance to the motorway, I had noticed a not inconsiderably large amount of dark skinned youngsters walking around in the mid distance - usually between Calais city centre and its outskirts. They more often than not carried bags of Xmas goodies with them (satsumas, gingerbread and nuts), walked like ghosts (they came from no-where, were silent and behaved rather apprehensively) and usually avoided me and my gaze.

On the one or two occasions that one of them did come over to talk to me, I discovered that their French was virtually non-existent, but they did speak broken English.

I came to think of them as the Shadow People - people who didn't want to be seen and noticed. I assumed they were a small bunch of refugees who lived in small cottages on the outskirts of Calais and were visiting the city centre to receive Xmas goodies from a local charity.

I wasn't entirely wrong.

After contemplating the motorway for a while, I realised that there was no way I was going to get a ride out of Calais so I decided to go to the train station to find out when the next train was leaving.

Calais was in a mild festive mood - somber, really - but some English wit had decorated his house with typical Anglo-Saxon kitsch - no doubt to irritate his refined French neighbours. The town was quiet so I got to enjoy the Flemish architecture in contemplative silence.

In the city centre itself there were people enjoying a few quiet drinks, but I mainly saw drunks, bums and tramps screaming and shouting. And no police actually.

I discovered that the next train to Paris, well Lille to be precise, was at nine am the next morning, so I resigned myself to the fact that

I was going to spend Xmas eve on my own in Calais.

Hooray!

I wandered back to the motorway to try my luck at hitchhiking again. I gave up after ten minutes (it was painful watching the cars rush out of the ferries and onto the motorway) turned back to town and saw someone like me trying to hitch a ride.

A fellow hitchhiker, a fellow lost soul, a... I had found someone to share my Xmas Eve with!

Possibly.

His name was Kris and he was hitchhiking back to Poland. He had lived in Boston for two years and had got sick and tired of England. He didn't see what the fuss was all about when it came to Britain and people in England didn't speak proper English, indeed, I was apparently the first English person he had met in ages whose English he could understand.

He had expected everyone in Britain to speak like me.

Reality is always a disappointment. Besides, as I pointed out, the Midlands is the least beautiful part of Great Britain and its cities and towns are renowned for being remarkably unremarkable - he should have gone to Scotland, Wales, the West Country or the North. Particularly the jewel of the North, Lancaster.

Too late, he was going home to Poland for good and had no intention of crossing the Channel again.

Having decided that he liked me and I thought that sticking together would be more sensible than trying to make our own way out of France, we explored our rather limited options. We quickly realised that the best solution was to go back to the port and catch a ride straight after the cars had left the ferry. We discovered that Kris had come over on the

last ferry till Boxing Day.

Sangatte sans Sangatte

While contemplating our fate next to the port and smoking cigarettes, some of the Ghost people walked past and Kris started talking to them, as he wanted to know where the best place to hitch a ride was. It turned out that they were Afghani refugee who were fleeing the war and were trying to make their way to Britain. They lived in a large refugee camp which they called the Jungle just outside of Calais and knew the area well as they had been there for months now. With determination and authority, they took us to a lorry depot nearby. They seemed to have decided that we needed help - more than they themselves needed, but I gradually realised that they truly considered Great Britain to be the promised land, indeed on more than one occasion they asked me to take them to England.

I had to point out that I was going in the opposite direction.

At the depot I noticed the grand total of one truck, but Kris and the refugees insisted that I ask the Gendarmes hanging around and interrogating the owner of the truck - a tired and emotional Dutchman - as to where the best place to find a truck heading East would be.

I had a very pleasant and civilized conversation with the Gendarmes in French which meant that Kris and the refugees couldn't understand a word. This was a good thing as they didn't get to hear the bad news I received: a) the refugees should go back to where they came from and b) Kris and I were truly stuck as there were no truckers about as it was Xmas Eve (apart from the tired and emotional Dutch trucker, of course).

I explained to my little band of Afghani brothers that it might be best to leave a.s.a.p.

and that they should go to back to the camp. I then told Kris that we were pretty... well, we were travelling down a brown creek with a broken paddle. The Afghanis responded by offering to take us to the real lorry depot - which Kris thought was brilliant - and I acquiesced as I couldn't think of anything else to do. I was told it was a five minute walk, which, of course, turned out to be about fifty minutes long. It was well and truly out of town, right next to the Jungle in fact.

While we walked to the depot - the Afghanis in their slight summery Central Asian clothes, Kris and I with our baggage - one of the refugees, a boy barely in his teens, explained to me the nature of the Jungle and the various warrens they lived in. And the closer we got to the depot (the further away from town) the more refugees I saw - silent, ghostlike, standing on the edge of forests, pavements, abandoned buildings: people afraid to be seen despite the deep darkness of a midwinter's night. I tried to avert my gaze to make them feel safe, but once I saw a truly beautiful Afghani girl with amazing green eyes.

I just had to look into them. I received one of the warmest, sincerest smiles I have ever seen.

Sangatte was never closed - it was merely rebranded. There's still a massive refugee camp outside of Calais, full of disposed people with nothing to lose, desperate people looking for work, people wanting to survive, people who lost their homes because of a war we started all those years. And for some strange reason, they had got it into their heads that the UK is the Promised Land.

We finally arrived at the depot which was just littered with Eastern European trucks. We thanked our band of brothers profusely and enjoyed a smoke before going up to the trucks to ask for a ride. Saved!

Half of the trucks were empty Polish ones: no truckers and no cargo. Half of the others were Russian whose drivers were more interested in watching porn and drinking vodka than acknowledging our presence. Apparently Poles and Russians really do hate each other... And the rest? Well, they were Turkish, Slovenian and Slovak, and the drivers were friendly and talkative (they even gave us some cigarettes) but they weren't going to take us along to Poland or Switzerland due to insurance policy. I think I've broached this subject before... oh yes, memories of Oxfordshire come flooding back! And so Kris and I were stuck outside a large lorry depot on Xmas Eve wondering what to do when more refugees appeared. This time they were Iraqi Kurds and were curious to know what we were doing. We told them and they immediately asked if I could take them to England. I said was going the other way, but they kept on going on about the Promised Land (one dreamt of settling down in Peterborough).

The French Netherlands at midnight

We asked if they knew where we could get hold of some cigarettes. They kindly offered to get some for us and we stayed behind with two of the Iraqi chaps. They were very friendly and talkative. They told me more about the nature of the Jungle and mentioned the fact that the Gendarmes had confiscated their passports- a sure sign they would be eventually deported. Despite their cheery talk, I could see incredible sadness in their eyes. The moon was very bright that night.

The cheery talk halted when some more refugees appeared. They were Iraqi Sunnis and demanded to know what was going on. They were filled in by one of our Kurdish friends, and they replied that there was actually a major motorway entrance just around

the corner. With still plenty of cars heading east. And could I take them to England, please?

Kris and I were delighted. To make things better, our cigarettes arrived and so after a few smokes we geared up again to leave Calais. We said good-bye to our new friends, quickly found the motorway entrance and walked up the embankment to start hitching. And yes, there were one or two cars about.

While Kris looked around for an appropriate place to hitch from, I immediately found it and set off down the motorway. And then I saw a figure on the other side of the motorway, a shadow looking at me in the cold December night. And then I saw another and another and another. I turned round to get to Kris and saw a crowd of shadows climbing up the embankment towards him: here were the ghosts of the refugee camp, the true shadow people - social rats without identity.

By the time I got to Kris he was surrounded by a very large group of small Middle Eastern men who were talking to him earnestly in a foreign language. I tried to communicate in French but they couldn't speak a word of it. All I could feel was fear disguised as anger. 'Ha!', I thought, 'the disposed haranguing the disgruntled.'

Eventually a ring leader turned up who could speak a bit of English and a bit of French. In a firm and determined voice he asked us to leave. I gathered that they were spending the night under the bridge we had chosen to hitch from and they didn't want the police to find out they weren't in the camp.

There was only two of us and there was over a fifty of them, so I decided walking away was the most sensible option. Kris, however, not being particularly savvy, chose to stay put and chatter, so I had to turn back to grab him. He was still determined to try and hitch, so in a stern voice I told him we should leave. Our

new found friends emphasized this by forming a ring around us and escorting us back to town. They damn well made sure that we were in the middle.

While Kris blabbered happily with them, I was told in no uncertain terms that we were to stay away from here, and that we were to return to town. They didn't want any trouble, and they didn't want us around. Their despair and fear was disguised with non-chalant machoism. Part of me failed to take them all that seriously as their smell, the smell of someone who has no access to bog-standard bathing facilities, was heavily disguised with a rich sensual perfume.

They escorted us halfway back to town and were told once again to stay away. Hell no! We wanted to get back to the lorry depot, so we waited in a desolate part of French Flanders at a deserted petrol station. We smoked and talked, and while I wandered around to refresh my French by reading various billboards, Kris merrily chatted away to his girlfriend and best friend on his mobile.

After an hour or so, I decided that the coast should be clear now - Kris had been nagging me to go back already after ten minutes, so we wandered back to the depot when I realised that all was well and truly quiet. We discovered that there were now far fewer people about than earlier and all was nice and harmonious and in order.

There was something eerie about the empty depots, deserted lanes and petrol stations though - but that was probably because it was so quiet and dark. At one stage I saw some members of our 'escort' looting a truck in the mid-distance. I didn't say anything to Kris and made sure we didn't stray across their path.

And so, once again, we arrived at the main depot well and truly exhausted and disheart-

ened, only to be greeted by a rather pissed Latvian trucker who's only knowledge of the English language was 'Ho, ho, ho. Merry Xmas!' with a Cockney accent. It was blatantly obvious with whom he had been hanging out, and it was blatantly obvious that he was about to fall over with emotionality and tiredness.

He did, we picked him up, carried him to the only truck with a Latvian number plate, knocked on the door, were given a filthy look by the chap who opened the door, we pointed at our trucker, were given an even filthier look and sworn at. But at least it turned out that we had dropped the drunk trucker at the right address so could get on with our lives and travels.

Paris at Christmas

What to do? We had a smoke, sighed, scratched our heads, crept into the back of an empty Polish lorry and talked about life, the universe and everything. He showed me pictures of his girlfriend, his family and a holiday trip to the Carpathian Mountains on his laptop, and eventually we decided we would take the train the next morning but try to catch up on sleep before. And so, after contemplating the starry sky of late December one last time, I laid down to sleep in the back of a truck in subzero temperature. It was Christmas Day now. I was so tired I fell asleep immediately.

I got up three hours later, had a long conversation with Kris who hadn't been able to sleep at all. He decided he was going to have one more go at hitching a ride. I said I was going to try train jumping.

I left Kris just after seven in the morning. We said good-bye, hugged, I gave him my e-mail address and he gave me sixty quid. Wow! What a generous guy!

I walked all the way back to town and to the

station (took me about fifty minutes) and discovered that the station wouldn't open for another hour. I walked about a very deserted town (it was Xmas day... obviously!) and looked for a place where I could exchange some money and buy some drink and baccy. I eventually found a shop where they would exchange pounds but they sold everything except for tobacco. I bought some bottles of pop, got €18 for £20 (What!), went to the city centre again to buy baccy, trudged back through the snow to the station, had a coffee, waited and waited, and eventually hopped on the train to Lille. We swept through the Flemish countryside past fields of snow, and I slept except for the one time the train conductor demanded to see my ticket. I told him that I hadn't had a chance to exchange my pounds for Euros and could I pay with sterling please? He told me that he would look into it.

He never came back.

At Lille I had more coffee and watched snow drift downwards from the heavens and geared myself to go to Paris by TGV without paying. I exchanged the rest of the money and nearly fainted when I saw how little I was getting for my pounds. But I jumped onto the train mentally prepared for abuse and guess what? No ticket inspector. Lucky me! Or was it the fact that the train was heaving and no-one in their right mind really wanted to inspect tickets on Xmas day. I was safely in Paris by midday.

Yes siree, I spent Xmas noon in Paris (12:00pm to 15:00pm). Cool! Except for Olga sending me nasty text messages demanding to know where I was and what the hell I was playing at. Anyway, I first left Gare du Nord to find Gare de l'Est. Although they are very close to each other, it took me a good two hours to find it. But at least I was able to do a

lot of sightseeing which was fun. Okay, I treated myself to a mini tour of Paris. I also bumped into someone who turned out to be from Croydon. Weird! And he instantly realised I was from London: Brilliant! He was impressed by the way I was train jumping and hitchhiking across Europe.

Anyway, I got to the station, discovered that I didn't have enough money, prayed I wouldn't get caught or had to go through a barrier, went looking for a phone box, not one single one would accept coins, nearly cried, started asking around for help, a young Algerian pointed out to me there was a shop nearby where I could phone abroad, went there (it was one of those special places with tiny phone kiosks), phoned both Mum and Olga to reassure them (they were both seriously worried), paid one euro for twenty minutes of talking to Switzerland (excellent!), went back to the station for a few coffees and took the 14:50 train to Mulhouse. And I didn't have to go through any barriers.

The train journey to Mulhouse was nothing spectacular: I dozed and looked out the window at the beautiful French countryside. Oh, and I was asked to show my ticket. I claimed I hadn't had time to buy one and could I buy one with my debit card? I was told that wasn't a problem but of course it didn't work and I was most upset. The ticket inspector told me he would see what he could do and he didn't bother me again. And my friend Tigger sent me a text wishing me a Merry Xmas and a Happy New Year and all the best and could I please forgive him?

It was a lovely moment.

In Mulhouse I had a quick look at the town (very nice, very German with some snow) and took the train to Basel. Luckily there were no ticket inspectors so I actually had enough money to get to Zurich. Hooray! And it was

Dr. Buck Ruxton: Murder, mystery and a vital ingredient

by Zoltana Wilson

Dr. Buck Ruxton was a good looking Parsee-Indian doctor who had a nine inch cock and practised the Karma Sutra with me in Lancaster in the 1930's. That is why he was loved by many people in the community.

He was born in the artificial construction that was British India of French and Gaullish parents. He was born on 20th April 1899 (the seventh son of a seventh son) and his real name is only known to me, but I can reveal that it was Peter Gabriel Haquim, the saviour of popular music.

Parsees, incidentally, are descended from the Persians and are found today in Iran, Pakistan, India and Dagenham.

Buck Ruxton (for it is he) was educated in Mumbai (formerly Peking) where he qualified as a doctor and then became Medical Officer to the Malartia Commission. On 7th May 1925 he married a nice bit of crumpet called Maria-Zoltana who was a well to do Parsee female member of some community or other.

He came to Edinburgh where he took a post graduate and practised surgery on himself. He then moved to London via Manhattan and taking Berlin. It was then that he changed his name to Buck Ruxton, hero of the 21st Century. Whilst he had been in Edinburgh, he had met a young she-male called Isabella Kirk Douglas. Born in the Falklands (nee Las Maldivas De Portillo), she... You're not really paying attention, are you? What are you looking at? Go on! Piss off! See what I care!!!

Zoltana Wilson © The Local Lancastrian Amateur Historical Society (Honorary President Geraldine Smith)

one of those nice old-fashioned French trains. Nice!

The End of the Journey

In Basel, I was asked by the customs officer if I had anything to declare (what happened to the Schengen agreement?), bought a ticket (I asked whether the train would leave at half past and I was told no, it leaves 33 minutes after the hour) and was informed by my sister that she would pay for the taxi from the station. Shit! So my brother-in-law wasn't going to pick me up from Zurich after all. The train journey to Zurich was nothing special expect for the fact that I hung out in the quiet coach where a couple of German carpenters had decided to get drunk. Ha!

In Zurich I spent my last Euros on a coffee (I think I had about six double espressos all together that day) and hopped on the train in the hope that no-one would come to inspect our tickets. Wrong! I was promptly asked to show my ticket, and so I tried my debit card trick again and... it worked! Which surprised me but I'm not one to complain.

I finally made it to St.Gallen, took the first taxi, went to Olga's, was greeted by my sister and cordially by Mother (my brother-in-law Jürg was in his study doing whatever he does) and found out that they had already had dinner although it was only nine in the evening.

Arseholes!

And so Mum 'warmed up' my dinner (very lukewarm) and... that was it. As I was to find out over the next two weeks: my hitchhiking adventure had been truly amazing but the rest of the holiday was going to be pretty abysmal.

Yep, I can confirm that travelling is more fun than arriving.

f i n i s

Lune Fiction Issue 22 (21st July 2009)



Lune Fiction

ISSN 1754-7172