

[The Sickbus Chronicles]

by jollyjon v.1.3 December 2002.

PART ONE

Wembley, Saturday 16th November 2002

and so begins what Des so skillfully observed at Kings Cross as none other than "the journey into madness".

The pink double decker tour bus from Starline UK is not actually a salubrious tour bus at all but is evidently an enormous hearse with toilet facilities for dwarves. The upper deck comprises comfortable lounge area used for receiving guests and comprises a vast dvd and cd library for our edification and aural / visual stimulation. Or so said the company bumpf, in actuality it comprised one damaged copy of the Texas Chainsaw Massacre DVD and David Cassidy's greatest hits CD. The opulent snugly upholstered sleeping quarters were in fact 14 old reject coffins nailed together in a large pile resembling the black hole of Calcutta. jollyjon was fortunate to acquire two (yes two - are you reading this fellow buskateers) windows in his death box whilst Mr Forsyth was less fortunate obtaining what can be best described as a dog kennel with plush curtainage. Downstairs was housed a toilet designed for those who were vertically challenged having a headroom of under five feet i'll wager. It took a great deal of skill and accuracy for those of us of a masculine persuasion to, what we shall colloquilly call, take a wazz at 70 miles an hour in the outside lane of the motorway. Number twos were banned on the bus - we didn't want a log jam forming. The rest of the downstairs comprised a number of faux leather airline style seats salvaged from a fleet of 1970's Hillman Hunters, a fridge, microwave and a dark mysterious cupboard that had lurking in its recesses a tin of minestrone soup bought back when Harold Wilson was at Number 10. Behind a chocolate brown carpet clad door was the driver's abode. Three things will remind me of Tony, for that was the driver's name, his cantankerousness, his need to sleep far too often, his bran flakes fetish and his enormous accelerator foot. Sorry four things.

Lunched on iffy chilli and then queued for hours outside Wembley in weather that penguins would have avoided, it was so cold that parts of my anatomy shrunk and withdrew like landing gear behind a couple of old bomb bay doors. Mrs H it seems could quite easily get a job with the coastguard. Her stentorian voice, with which she bellowed "I am the front of the queue" could quite easily be used by HM Coastguard who could float her out into the Channel during foggy weather and get her to shout at shipping.

Mr O has food poisoning.

Spike the chanteur with the Quire Boys is into recycling it seems taking the opportunity at the end of their set to hurl his microphone and the large lump of aluminium it is attached to into the audience striking Jill on her waving hand with sufficient force for her to require medical attention after the show. What a naughty boy he was, he was gonna regret that later on in the week for Mrs H was on his case ...

Note to Pat Novak. You are to be applauded for the bulk purchase of stage blood that you made for tonights show. He wafted around a large economy Buxton Spring bottle crammed to the neck with blood. We were absolutely drenched. It would seem that the Blood budget must have been blown that night as the remaining UK shows were pretty lacking in the sanguine department.

Michael Bruce joined Mr Cooper on stage for Schools Out.

We are joined on the bus by Mr Bruce after the show. Dolly and he, well how can I put this delicately, got to know each other intimately. Not really sure what to do with the photos. Mr Bruce played some of his new tunes on the bus hifi and was accompanied by Chris (who we understand has appeared on Stars in Their Eyes as Mr Cooper). We were forced to ask them to leave in the wee small hours as they had overstayed their welcome, drunk all our Horlicks and we had places to go.

jollyjon's lovely new friends the Dingles and Pseudo Dingle joined us in the Entertainment lounge for a tincture too....

As we left for Brighton Dolly (for she was the most alert at this moment in time) noticed that Mr Forsyth's kennel was ominously empty. We were only 12 for the journey south, where the chuff could he be ? Rumours abounded that he had run away and joined a strange religious cult. All would be revealed later in the tour.

Sunday 17th November Brighton

I learnt today that "Canadian toilet flushes are considerably more powerful than American ones" and I thought therefore it was only polite to share that bit of vital trivia with you.

Mid morning we were joined by a mysterious blue van from which poured an orange T shirt sporting baldie. Would you Adam & Eve it , it was Mr Forsyth who had undergone an amazing Hare Krishna conversion. Although I have to say I have my doubts over the fervency of his conversion as how many Krishna dudes do you know travel loaded up to the gunnels with Black Rum (no ice) and a Karaoke Machine ?

Regarding the pink bus can I just let you know that I'm struggling to include what's long, pink and thin ? jokes in here somewhere but all the punchlines I know talk about sailors and seamen. Never mind. We parked up on the local drag racing strip near the lovely seaside adjacent to the nudist beach. It was far too chilly willy for that kind of mularkey though, although I'm told one of our number did expose himself partly that frosty morning.

Lisa in a stunning spidersweb face and dress was first in line. Stuck to the pavement she received several coins flung her way by well meaning Brightonians. A gang of Big Issue vendors eyed her suspiciously from across the boulevard. jollyjon was seen entering one of many Weatherspoons frequented on this tour with William Nathaniel Crowe, Krishna Forsyth and Backstage Des in tow. The first of many daily imbibations of the old fermented.

Back at the queue we were joined by Mr Edward Zag and Messrs Singer & Wright who seemed more than happy to queue with the busites.

And what of the show ???? We booed the Quireboys (cause we are hard barstewards) and I swear I heard someone shout Mr Grimsdale at the Thunder microphone toter. Must have imagined it. And Alice ????

After the show we keyholed Mr Shep "Its been 6 years" Gordon for a team photo. He was initially wary of us until we had advised him that we had all been through the car wash that morning in the bus with the windows open.

Des was mostly backstage as per...

Back on the bus two rum/lager fests ensued in the non smoking and smoking lounges. The early morning denegerating into a top Alice Sheep Song Competition (Bee my Lover etc) and also a Monkey alternative I am reliably informed.

Day off tomorrow..

Monday 18th November Brighton (still)

The previous night / early morning as I passed out in my coffin I became aware of what I think our American friends call an outbreak of particularly deafening Bronx Cheers near to my pit. So deafening were they that I slipped into my alcohol fueled coma with an enormous grin on my contorted visage. The only cause for concern I had was that this outbreak of back passage flatulence appeared to be heavily laden with swamp gas and more worryingly appeared to be emanating from my colleague below, Mr Fields.

Imagine my surprise when I awoke the next day bright and early to hear a rather unique dawn chorus. The farting, for thats what it was dear reader, had now expanded to epidemic proportions and most worrying of all it appeared to be coming from my bed. I knew I had taken several large infusions of Holsten Pils and eaten half a shedload of dry roasted the night before but surely I wasn't to blame. Even Dolly was absent. I fully intended to visit a Brighton Doctor to discuss my Phantom Phlatuence Phenomenum when a small snigger from the direction of the Forsyth Kennel alerted me that something was amiss. Mr F had kindly placed , what can be best described as an Electronic Farting Appliance in my bed. Via the wonders of modern science it was able to let out a whole range of farty fart noises. Small phut phut ones, huge great double barrellled cheers and most disgustingly of all, what we call over this side of the pond, wet ones. Ewwwwwwwwww. Twas a jolly jape and was guaranteed to make additional appearances throughout the week to startle our unsuspecting bedfellows. Wasn't it Mr & Mrs H ?

Hardly had the grand expedition started when we were rewarded for good behaviour with a day off in Brighton, home of the Pavilion, Brighton Rock, Fatboy Whatsisface and the largest endemic Margaret Rutherford Transsexual population in the UK. More of that later. Dolly had been up all night partying hard, begging to be taken to a gig. She was a miserable pleader but her persistent bleatings were starting to garner support amongst my fellow busites. We split up into small grouplets and headed off into town for some jiggery-pokery promising to all meet up that night in a posh Italian eatery, Piccolos, for some fine fare and the odd tincture or two. I banished Dolly to my bed and skidaddled off the omnibus with her incessant baaings still in my earhole. If only I'd known then, what I know now, that our time together was limited I would have let her buff up her hooves, get her curling tongs out and taken my beloved out on the razzle. Sob.

I, jollyjon, headed off with Mr Forsyth, Mr Crowe and Mr Fields with only three things in mind, to find an internet cafe, to have a little drinkie, to find a flat cap and to have another little drinkie. Sorry four things. Now I know that having scanned our "To Do" list you have a question don't you ?

Well one of our party, Mr F had convinced the rest of us that the lead singer of Thunder had been abducted by aliens and had been replaced by Norman Wisdom. (Which is not that far fetched if you compare their facial mannerisms and stage antics). He had taken already to shouting out "Mr Grimsdale" at opportune moments during their set and wanted to up the ante at the next shows by hurling a flat cap onto the stage so that Mr Bowes, or rather his alien imposter, might don same and pratfall about the stage hollering "Mr Grimsdale". With me so far ?

So this is where a seven foot, swarthy, Margaret Rutherford Transdoodah enters out tale. For he / she ran a second hand tifter emporium which we had frequented, for the previously detailed reason. We didn't stay to purchase a fine bonnet however but beat a hasty retreat, such was our shock, into the Gay Internet Cafe across the road. Strike Two from our list. We'd had a few sherbets by now and so we were not thinking all that logically when it suddenly dawned on us that as this was a Gay Internet Cafe, maybe just maybe, we might need to be gay to book a session on the PC. Foolishly, or skillfully, depending on your point of view we decided on a group hug there and then in the middle of the shop. It seemed to have the desired effect, for not only did we get internet access but at a discounted rate to boot.

All web work accomplished we decided on a few more drinkies. We were a tad peckish by now and nearly entered a local Oyster Bar until I advised against it warning my fellow boozers that "Oysters taste like sandy bags of snot" and besides we had an Italian to go to. We skidaddled through the backstreets of Brighton and arrived gracefully outside Piccolos just as our fellow travellers were entering the establishment. What followed was a most excellent meal punctuated, at least in Mr F's case, with quick trips across the road to the adjacent hostelry for several black rum & cokes as the restaurant was rumless. The restaurant staff were very obliging but just slightly wary of a rummed up Hare Krishna who kept up an almost non stop stream of impersonations all night. Lets face it we were very rowdy down our end of the table and for that I would like to apologise to our fellow Brightonian guests...

The ordering was handled professionally but things did appear to go awry when the hors d'oeuvres started to arrive. A lovely young thing approached our table and whispered "Cheesy Dough Balls ?". Not a sound was heard and the poor girl was forced to say it again until Adrian, Mr A Cooper himself said "They're for me I just wanted to hear you say it again". Well the place was in uproar, several of our party had to be hoovered up off the floor and the poor waitress went beetroot.

In a sudden sober moment I gathered all the money together, left a hefty tip and headed out into the night. Mr A Cooper, once outside, shared with us another skill he has obviously mastered by poledancing professionally around a couple of Brighton's more ornate streetlights. A few of our number endured some quite appalling karaoke out on the pier, including a chap who told us he had never sung Angels before launching into his repertoire. We were all agreed that at the end of his performance he still had not sung Mr Williams tearjerker. Mr O was so disgusted that he hotfooted it back to the bus with us closely in tow.

A couple of things for you to note at this point. It appeared we had managed to park the bus on the local drag racing road and so we were treated to a cacophony of skids, revvvs and hand brake turns combined with the acrid smell of burning rubber once back on the bus. And secondly a small tip. How can you determine when Mr Crowe and Mr Fields have had too much to drink ? Well suffice it to say, Mr F's broad Belfast lilt gives way for a dreadful cockney accent and Mr C's Caledonian croak gives way to a quite bizarre geezer impersonation. jollyjon on the other hand was politeness and decorum personified as I pecked Dolly on the cheek and passed once again into the Land of Nod.

Tuesday 19th November Bournemouth.

Today was to be the day dear reader, her persistence had paid off, her ear lobe nibbling in the night had born fruit, today I was going to take Dolly to her first Alice Cooper show. O she was so happy as she gambolled and cavorted upstairs in the Sickbus. I however had a gnawing pain in my stomach I just felt that today was going to be full of all sorts of danger and grief. And so it was to prove.

On the drive into Bournemouth we stopped off in Fareham for two reasons. Firstly to pick up Mrs Coach

Driver as it turns out she had forgotten what her cantankerous hubby looked like, secondly to ablate ourselves in the local ablutions oh and thirdly because we had a major tyre blow out. OK three reasons I did fail maths as a pimply youth you know. We were fortunate that the enormous rear inner tyre didnt let go whilst we were wellying it down the dual carriageway cause we might not have been here now to put this all down on paper. Indeed I'm told that someone was in the lavatory when it did blow and had to retire upstairs to change into another pair of tour trousers pronto like. Rather than just go through the motions don't you know.

Anyway fully ablated and with all our collective important little places clean and with a brand new spanking second hand back street remould on we crept into Bournemouth home of the most badly stocked Harry Ramsdens in the UK (as I'm sure you'll all remember from last year's epistle). I took the opportunity to apply a final starching to my doctor's white coat and headed off to the BIC with Dolly under my arm. For today was Dolly's debut !

Sgt Major L Harrington gave us our queuing orders and we stationed ourselves at two points in the foyer ready to go over the top at the drop of a hat. Dolly and I were stage right, Dolly resplendent in her newly applied Alice Cooper eyes. She was feeling sassy and she looked as foxy as a fox too.

Whilst we queued it seems that our beloved bus driver was having a torrid time. He managed to (allegedly) ground the bus on the way into a garage, fracturing a pipelet that interconnects the four, hundred gallon, diesel tanks and thus causing said gallonage to err well cascade in an enormous torrent across the forecourt. This environmental disaster was then visited by a long officious stream of the great and the good local authority services in Bournemouth. The Fire Brigade with an impressive large sucky thing, an ever increasing number of scrambled egg covered police, the environmental health lady and two geezers with a lorry load of sand. Rumours that both Kate Adie and David Attenborough had been mobilised by the BBC proved to be unfounded. We are fortunate that we had our own covert press person on board for Chris with journalistic skill made a rather pleasant documentary of the unfolding shenanigans which I understand will be up for the Silver Extinguisher Award at next years Bournemouth International "Documentaries on a Shoestring" Festival. When will we see the final version Chris ?

Now gentle reader queuing for hours on end in strange foyers or worse outside rain soaked venues may appear to be a peculiarly British obsession. We were fortunate however to have the queen of queuing on our side for this tour the remarkable Lisa Harrington. Her slavish devotion to standing in line and her voluminous outbursts of "I am the front of the queue" will have scarred many a concert goer this past tour. Seriously though bless you Mrs H without your stirring efforts where would we have been ? A remarkable by product of all this waiting around is the large number of complete strangers who approach you for a natter and also the strange anecdotes your fellow queuees impart. For example...

I was approached by a sassy archaeologist from Uzbekistan called Jennifer who wanted to know whether as a doctor (keep up now I had a white coat on - remember ?) was I a Care in the Community placement given the strange detritus I had standing around me. Des I remember had a glint in his one good eye as she spoke. She did suddenly change her mind in mid sentence however when she espyed Dolly nestling between my legs. I ask you a sassy lady from Uzbekistan what are the chances of that ?

And another example. Apparently Bill Crowe was fleeced for "Nine pond seventy toooooooooooooooooooooo" for his breakfast the other morning and it had hit him hard in his sporan. Complete strangers were to approach him throughout the week enquiring how much his breakfast was as if by magic. Just how could that have happened Mr C ? "Aye and 50 peeeeeeeeeee for a wee thingy of jam ".

Hours passed with little respite. Des and I made a foray for nosh into the town. An irate shop owner initially refused to sell me a Ginster's Finest because she was appalled that I had come direct from the hospital covered in blood. Had I no concept of hygiene she ranted. After a sticky moment she mellowed when I was able to tell her that her bunion appointment would come through her postbox any day now.

Promptly at 6 the doors opened and we ran down to the barrier, the only place to be, and we waited Dolly giving the eye to several of the wary Security Personnel. The support did there thing (I heard Mr Grimsdale again that night where was it coming from ?) and then as Dolly's buttocks tensed the Master took the stage once again to a roar from a top hole crowd.

Inquisitive reader, hindsight, is a beautiful thing. With hindsight Dolly's twitching buttocks should have forewarned me. Shortly after Alice's reoperation for No More Mister Nice Guy, Dolly started to oscillate wildly in full view of the Master. Several times he threw a wary glance in her direction and she his. I was sensing a brutal attraction between them. People around me edged away slightly as they sensed my pain. Schools Out began and the crowd roared their approval, Dolly became increasingly agitated and then as Alice, sword in hand, introduced party time, the world for me fell apart.

Dolly sensing the smell of the crowd and with fire in her belly launched herself at the stage and at Mr Cooper. She fell desparately short but was scooped up by a kind security chappie and returned to me. Battered and slightly bruised (I noticed a trickle of blood from her hind quarters those same hind quarters she had so badly scarred as she frolicked in the sheep dip "int top field" last summer) we had a final caress and then suddenly she was gone.

Dolly, with fire in her one good eye (the canker in her other eye had not cleared up despite frequent applications of Nurse Gladys Emmanuel's Patent Ovine Canker Unction and the odd Guinness eye bath) propelled herself stageward at the self same time that Mr Cooper, weapon in hand, was within her eyeline. She was brutally skewered like a sheep on a sword and Alice's eyes were full of awe as she died painfully by his own hand. He, just like those killer whales you see on the telly, toyed with her now heavily deflating corpse and used her callously to burst all of the rainbow coloured balloons that proliferated at that point on the stage. Her lifeless body stained by a hideous melange of blood, confetti, talcum powder, dollar bills and wool. His dastardly deed done he propelled her flaccid carcass through the putrid air to the rear of the stage where she was hideously trampled under foot by Mr Cooper's despicable henchmen. Frantically my eyes scoured the stage for hers but cadaver eyes upon me saw nothing. Dolly was dead, slain by Alice Cooper. "J'accuse !" I roared. The encore is now just a distant memory but as Cold Ethyl / Cold Dolly struck up Alice scooped up Dolly's limp frame and cradled her gently in his arms as he serenaded her. "She's cool in bed she ought to be cause Dolly's dead" I mouthed in the direction of her assassin. Was that just a hint of remorse I saw flit across his steely blue eyes ?

I'm struggling to type here allow me a moment to reflect will you ?

Three things flashed through my mind, Dolly had been murdered, were there witnesses ?, would I get the chance to confront her killer ? and had anyone taken any decent photos ? Whoops sorry four things.

The show over, I took delivery of Dolly's lifeless body from superfan Mr Michael who had retrieved her trampled remains from the stage and numbly, hardly speaking I exited the Arena crestfallen in search of the Sickbus and some solace from an enormous alcohol fuelled imbibation.

We drove into the night and by 4 am I passed out in my private sanctuary with only three thoughts in my

head. That revenge was a dish best served cold, meeting the lovely Calico to exchange signatures outside the venue, hearing Jill boasting about some hideous Bombay Bad Boy and the overarching desperate desire to get up and brave that stinking toilet once again at 70 miles an hour. Sorry four things.

END OF PART ONE.

PART TWO.

Wednesday 20th November Manchester.

And what of Manchester

Dear Reader, I have lost my zest as a scribe. So distraught was I by the loss of Dolly that I just didn't have it in me to continue my epistle. I knew that my one fan (Hi Doris from Norwich) would be well and truly gutted by this terrible state of affairs so I decided to sign up for some Ovine Aversion Therapy. Unfortunately despite scouring the Yellow Pages the only Internationally renowned Ovine Therapist is apparently based in Nigeria so I was forced to settle for second best. A kindly Sickthing's ear. Where kindly is of course a misnomer. The following conversation, although not verbatim, took place and has I am pleased to say enabled me to once more place myself adjacent to my keyboard and to continue with this missive.

" Hi X I have been having terrible writers block and keep tossing all night thinking of my lost one, Dolly, Princess of Ovines. She's been murdered !"

" Was the murder that traumatic? Just think of mint sauce and it will make a lot more sense."

" You callous sod you never knew her !"

" I became strangely drawn to her during the short period of our acquaintance. - You do realise they were serving lamb in catering soon after?"

Aversion therapy my arse, his last words were the last straw. If I didn't get on with the Chronicles how could I tell you all about me confronting the murderer ?". But that was still the best part of a week away.....

Now where were we ?... meanwhile on the road to Manchester we were holed up in Sandbach services, victims of the cantankerous one's tachograph. Its fair to say that being stranded 30 odd miles from a potential queue at the MEN Arena was a cause of considerable, torment to the Queue Queen. Bowed but not defeated she summoned together her three trustiest lieutenants to inform them she had dreamt up one of the most wickedest of wheezes known to woman, man and sheep. Had she found a Tardis in a local Doctor Who exhibition with which to travel in time ? - no, had she rung Mr S Gordon and persuaded him to relocate the gig to The Rampant Ram in Sandbach ?- err no, but I have no doubt she would have tried if only her cellphone hadn't been on the blink. No with Reynard cunning she hired a taxi and as "my good man don't spare the horses for I am the front of the queue" was heard issuing from the taxi's rear window it hurtled out of the services at an alarming rate. Onward to Manchester !

The remaining less trusted lieutenants (aka The Cannon Fodder) were left for another 3 hours or so to await the awakening of Prince Charming from his slumbers before we were able to enter Manchester in our long thin pink one.

Now glancing down at my notebook (yes I took notes on tour you don't think I make this dross up do you ?) I can tell that these few hours must have been what we writers call dead time for my notes make absolutely no sense. The following should show you what I mean...

First of all it says " Put your pasty face next to mine love" which I can tell you is a hidden alternative Richie Scarlet lyric. However I can't and will not tell you its significance. You had to be on the Sickbus and besides I suspect it would lose a lot in translation.

Then it says " The Phantom Eel Picture" followed interestingly by the following tidbit "Germany's Eel soup contains no eels" ... Educational if nothing else.. More of the eel picture later

There follows a bit that I am censoring again as its not for public consumption. I can tell you we may well have had what we call a tealeaf on the bus or at least operating from the bus. He / she was seen purloining the last meal and drink from a dozing, potless, ne'er-do-well. In a candid moment she / he was heard to say "I sometimes have a problem with taking things". Confession is good for the soul indeed the kleptomaniac found the whole confessional experience enormously cathartic.

Finally on the same page I have scribbled "I am the most flamboyant heterosexual you are ever going to meet". Well we have to agree with you Mr Orlay, we were amazed by the enormous panpoly of gorgeous outfits that you treated us with as the tour progressed and it seems only right and proper that your apposite disclosure should be included in this tome. We applaud you joining us on the bus Mr O but we were left in no doubt that you are no milquetoast sir !

We wisely left the coach in a salubrious backstreet with a slightly rum cove who said he'd guard our home for a few quid as we were appearing at the MEN that night. Reunited with QQ we were issued with guard duties as there was unfortunately a whole slew of potential means of ingress into the arena. But all was not lost as the doors opened "the front of the queue" and her cohorts descended down oodles of steps onto the icy floor below and ensconced ourselves adjacent but not touching the front barrier for the security proles had just given it a coat of paint and it was still tacky.

Point of interest the Arena usually hosts ice hockey tomfoolery and so we were stood on the ice. This was to be a first for me watching an Alice Cooper show on skates, it took a herculean effort to balance on my blades for all those hours. I was particulalrly pleased to have my Doctor's whites on as it was jolly parky that night.

The show over I was whisked (thanks to Mr Clark) backstage with backstage Des for some liggng. Whilst we quaffed our expensive lager various members of the support wandered round trying to make eye contact with someone who might chat with them. Mr Nelson gave me a wide berth and muttered something about "nice doctor's coat" and then in a bizarre Mr Benn moment a rather attractive young lady materialised by my side.

" I've got a message for you from the boys" she hissed.

O Goody I like games I may have said to which she imparted the following barbed threat ! " If you lot don't smile by the end of the tour there's gonna be trouble". Now I'm not that sharp on the uptake when wee girlies are up close in my personal space. So I grinned by best inane grin and she was gone. It wasn't until I saw her rematerialise alongside the Quireboys vocalist still sporting a fetching curtain on his bonce that the penny suddenly dropped. It seems our yawning, sleeping, snoring, picknicking and general "we're chuffing not gonna enjoy your terpsichcorean musings and we are unanimous" demeanour during

their performances at previous shows had not gone unnoticed. Hmm Mrs QQ was not gonna be pleased I was going to have to get her on the case. I certainly didnt want to get involved in any handbag fights, mock fisticuffs and / or other pugilist nonsense with that bunch of scallywags.

The Lovely Calico arrived and she discussed with the Doctor the Sickbus, regularly showering and general tour tips from one busite to another. Mr Dover & Mr Wright insisted on a photo with the Doctor so who was I to let them down. They insisted we party with them but Backstage Des was flagging and we had to hit the road for Newcastle so we made our apologies and left. Our lovely Bus Companions had waited outside for us in the cold because they believed we didn't know where the bus was parked so they waited. Bless you guys. Des & I secretly suspected that they didnt want to wander past Strangeways Hotel on their own and needed our support ...

Medical Moment : Mr Adrian Cooper was in the wars having obtained a swift kick to the ribs in an earlier crowd and was now heavily bruised.

Wholed up in Washington a lovely lady manufactured a most pleasing pepper fueled pizza and a most concomitant cappuccino for moi before I crashed at about 3 am with absolutely no thoughts in my head whatsoever (although I did espy a vagabond who asked me had I seen his chocolate bar and high fruit drinkie.. but we have already addressed that have we not ?)..... Poor jollyjon arrived precipitously in the land of nod as he was a tadge cream crackered don't you know.

Thursday 21st November Newcastle.

Thursday dawned cold and damp in fact to paraphrase Eric Olthwaite I suspect it were always raining in Washington except when it were fine and even then it were damp. By jingo it was as parky as a very parky thing when we vomitted off the Pink One at the rear of Newcastle's Telewest Arena. There was no sign of a queue due no doubt to the persistent percipitation but that was not going to perturb QQ and some of her closest queuees. Off they frogmarched and took up station a good five hours before doors open. I feel it is entirely appropriate to use the term frogmarched because QQ and two of her number had donned three voluminous kermit style waterproof ponchos a veritable sight to behold. Security were having none of it and quickly came out to fence them off.

The less dedicated of us snuck off into town, Backstage Des and I heading for a Greasy Spoon (in actuality the full range of cutlery and plates in this establishment had been bathed in grease) for a plate of fried unspecified and the frothiest weakest coffee this side of the Tyne. We also visited an Internet cafe that catered for all genders and sexual leanings to do some Cooper business as you do when on tour. Shortly afterwards we had an absolutely fantastic stroke of luck for there striding towards us almost unnoticed amongst the Geordie revellers and Christmas shoppers was none other than, well if I tell you he had a full head of too black hair and was bowed down against the cold but still exuded an air of being famous as his icy blue eyes scanned the crowd you'll know to whom I allude, yes it was..... Bill Crowe. Oh who were you expecting ? William had been on a photo fest and suggested we retire to a local alehouse for a noggin and a squint at his piccies.

It only seemed right and proper to go and relieve our chaps at queuefront but we decided on another half of fermented before trudging back to the venue. The crowd numbered at least 10 and I have to report that morale was low. In fact it was as low as the lowest thing you can imagine. They were drenched and cold. I suspect that insanity was bubbling up towards the surface as this little confession may show. A queuee who may wish to remain anonymous stuttered into my ear :-

" Standing in the wind and rain today from 1 until 6 has taken me beyond the brink of insanity " adding " You are a little bit right but mostly wrong" .

Temperatures plummeted and an eery river mist descended. Collectively we were losing the will to live when suddenly we all espied what we thought was a mirage. Striding out of the brume, cloud, condensation, dew, drizzle, fog, ground clouds, haze, moisture, pea soup, rain, smaze, and smog came a beaming German bearing gifts of piping hot beverages derived from all manner of beans. Wunderbar schon Jill. Despite not having a timepiece I could accurately tell that opening time was approaching as Kermit the QQ started to jig about like a whirling dervish. The doors were flung open as we perambulated nonchalantly in to the smallest of the arenas so far and took up station along the barrier. So relaxed were we that I even managed to pop out and point Percy at the Porcelain.

Alice it would seem was suffering in the voice / throat department. He was obviously in dire need of sucking on a fisherman's friend. He was forced to drop I Never Cry and then Poison went totally to cock but despite this he was of course the complete trouper and even managed to wing his whip in Annie's direction. I suspect for many of our number this may well have been a low point in the tour as Alice was suffering and the dreaded Sickbusitis seemed to be increasingly prevalent. Bill also capped off a top night by losing his wallet. (Mr Crowe has subsequently been reunited with his full wallet, lovely jubbly).

All was not lost as we were joined on the bus by lovely Queeny Frog and her equally lovely Sickbus Dragontown cake which she had beautifully prepared for us. Bless you Queeny ! We left Newcastle as we had arrived in the rain but with bellies full of cake and beer spirits were soon on the up besides we were off to foreign climes headed as we were for the Crowe's Nest in Bonnie Scotland. We were however only 11 that night as two of our number were thrown off the bus so advanced was their Sickbusitis that we condemned them to follow behind us in an unmarked white van.

I have been reminded that I need to apologise at this point for a quite appalling Ronnie Corbettian comedy performance concerning Arabs and Morris Minor car doors. Guess you had to be there.

We sloped into Scotland in the wee small hours and thoughtfully woke up the lovely Mary Crowe who greeted us with open arms and plied us with coffee as I sunk down into William's notoriously comfy arm chair as some hirsute chap called Dougal gave me a good licking. I had had a fair few drinkies by then so you might be advised to take these last few sentences with a wee bit of Sodium Chloride. Sleep followed very shortly thereafter as I dreamed dreamy dreams in my coffin I had only one thing on my mind. How the hell could I get to the front of the queue for the shower in the morning and I wondered whether Dougal was seeing anyone . Sorry two things. Again with hindsight what possible chance did I have of getting to the front of the shower queue with QQ and a German around. None, zilch in fact.

Friday 22nd November Glasgow.

17th ! How the hell was I the seventeenth person to use the Crowe Ablutions ?, there were only 13 of us for starters. Dougal did seem to have a hell of a shiny coat that fine morning. We adjourned to the local Tesco for the full Scottish Breakfast and in an amazing moment of forward planning we did a considerable booze run as well as investing in a surfeit of crunchy, nibbly accoutrements to boot.

We parked the bus adjacent to what is known locally as the Armadillo, one of a series of sheds of various sizes that make up the SECC. The Armadillo is so named because it resembles (have you guessed ?) an armadillo (Any of several omnivorous, burrowing, edentate mammals (family Dasypodidae), native to

southern North America and South America and characterized by an armorlike covering consisting of jointed bony plates.) Do you see ?

The indoor queue was to QQ's liking as we all pretty much mooched around for hours. Mr Friesen popped by for a Kodak and / or digital moment and then unfortunately it happened. I got recognised ! "I know you you're the Doctor in the Cooper show, I've seen you in all the shows, are you in it tonight ?". I advised my Caledonian friend that I had a night off but he proceeded to stare at me for far too long. Calico and Mr D had been locked out of the venue and so they had taken to wandering around aimlessly hammering on any door they could find with an increasing lack of success. "Are they in the show with you ?" my lovely new friend enquired.

QQ surpassed herself by cornering one of the Quireboy axemen and explained the little contretemps twixt Spike & Jill. Good to his word he returned later with a glazed Spike who apologised for his hurling antics....

The doors opened and we all once again sidled to the barrier and took our place at the head of what was a wild crowd that swelled to at least 7000 all stood in this enormous shed. I was to experience an interesting new phenomenum that night. Stationed immediately behind me was a wee Scottish Mountaineering Gnome Photographer who kept climbing up by back to take a whole series of stage snaps. I would turn round occasionally and scowl at him but even had to stop that as he was particularly adept at blinding me with his flashgun too. Stuff this for a game of soldiers. During a lull I pirouetted round and bellowed "I am not a tripod" as loud as I chuffing could which seemed to do the trick as at least thirty people took a step back from the weird doctor.

Mr Cooper's voice continued to give him gyp that night empling "I've lost my voice so I need your help" we and the other 6987 were happy to oblige. I knew our skilled Karaoke practice would bear fruit. Krishna Forsyth and I had sent a note back stage with a passing superfan to say we were ready and able to vault up on the stage and sing I Never Cry if required. Unbelievably the call did not come. Come the band intros Alice once again introduced Chuck Wright as coming from (insert current city name here). He sheepishly said "you`re not going to believe this", then pointed directly to BS Des, Jackboot Jill and Si, who were shaking their heads, and said, "and you guys are NEVER going to believe this", "from Glasgow Chuck Wright !"...

The show over I was so pleased to see my lovely Dingle and Pseudo Dingle chicken toting friends approaching me through the departing throng. They presented me with a lovely memorial postcard in memory of Dolly. Bless you guys I was touched to read the heartfelt inscriptions that you had obviously taken a considerable amount of time over and in your best joined up too. It seemed only right and proper that we should sally forth and enjoy a libation in the upstairs entertainment zone back on the bus. Which is what we did before heading off through the night south of the border towards the equator, actually to Birmingham.

We Karaoke fiends participated in an entertaining Jive Bunny / Alice Cooper / Ian Dury Mix that night that left many of our compadres completely dumbstruck...

"I am Dolly" jollyjon was heard to confess as several buskateers were forced to restrain him as his behaviour teetered on the edge of acceptable before plummeting headlong away from adequate, appropriate, average, decent, ducky, fair, fit, fitting, good, hunky-dory, okey-dokey, passable and proper. [Why the hell was that pomposity in the third person jollyjon ?] [sorry Ethyl (Ethyl has been comforting

me after the demise of dearly departed Dolly)].

END OF PART TWO.

PART THREE.

Saturday 23rd November, Birmingham NEC.

It's Saturday so this must be Birmingham, home of the yeti's foot naanyour education continues you lucky bleeders.

Oh and I am required by the Lemsip people who are considering sponsoring Sickbus2 to give you a daily medical report. Mr O has fluid issues.

The gig, which is what I am told is the name for concerts in young person's parlance today, was to take place in one of many enormous sheds out at the NEC. A leather clad overabundance of motorcycle freaks and freakesses had arrived too in their thousands for a Moto Guzzi and Castrol GTX Fest so parking was at a premium. It was time to blag a tadge, each florescent yellow parking dude didn't seem to be able to see past the fact that we sported Monsters of Rock Access passes and so slowly we oozed through the maze of parking fortuitously ending up on the service road at the back of the Arena. Tony managed to hide us behind an enormous Black Lorry Jobby so that we were parked up just a spit from the Cooper Camp.

Tony also managed to secure us a landline so it is just possible that we may owe Alive Enterprises a couple of quid for electricity. I'm sure that should you choose to remit an invoice Mr Nelson we will be able to forward a Postal Order by return. Can we also apologise to all the NEC Thunder fans for the slight dip in the light show during their set that night but apparently they had problems when there was an almighty surge on the power line when a microwave, three hairdryers, one set of curling tongs, two sets of hair straighteners, a sandwich toaster and a strange depilatory device all kicked in simultaneously on a run down double decker pink tour bus that had mysteriously appeared out back. "Stone me" a particularly erudite Road Rat was heard to proclaim "I could have sworn Starline had scrapped that shed years ago".

Those that queue queued as Mother Nature saw fit to provide a barrage, bombardment, broadside and cannonade of hailstones and ice, a salvo of pelting rain, coupled with showers of sleet, all mixed together in an enormous volley that I would defy any airheaded Weather Reader to have kept up with on their chart..A passing Security operative took pity and returned with a number of strange looking plastic bags to offer some protection. It appears that there was a feminine hygiene display there earlier in the week sponsored by Femidom (but I digress).

Several motorcycle dudes and dudettes and a local paparazzi who had planted himself in a bushy bush near to the Pink One bore witness to two strange characters exuding almost unnoticed from the bus. One who wore an Alice Cooper Beanie and dark shades was whispered to be new rock sensation Alice G and the other apparently was his personal physician a certain Doctor O.Vine. Rumours that they were responsible for the Brutal Planet Remix and had been in secret negotiations with the Cooper Camp concerning a total remix of Brutal Planet tentatively entitled Phat Planet have yet to be confirmed or denied. Mr G and Dr Vine did seem to garner enormous respect from the NEC security as they were able to waft in and out of restricted areas willy nilly. They were, I am happy to report, brought down to earth when Mr C Wright totally blanked them as they were both severely lacking in the pulchritude

department..

There was a right old rigmarole getting in to the front pen as we had our tickets checked at least eight times on the way in. QQ was not best pleased on arrival on the barrier to see that Mr Leighton Rees was already front and centre. Jammy git. We were quickly placated however when he produced an infeasibly large bag of Jelly Jellies that proceeded to feed the first few rows several times, parable like.

The lovely Mr Cooper had not taken my fisherman's friends advice because we was just a tad croaky once again and despite our miserable pleadings we were once again denied access to the stage to sing I Never Cry.. The Shock Rock Supremo did once again manage to have a one on one chat with BS Des from the stage during the band intros. He was also seen dispatching back, whence it came, a furry type head skull facsimile type thingy that Mr Nicebutdim had winged his way. The creature escaped with minor bruises and abrasions unlike a certain ovine of my ken. I'm welling up

Parked as we were backstage we did have a bit of a do apres show. We were joined by lovely Chocolate cake toting Sam, Mr Trustram P, Dean of Men as well as Mr Wicked Youngman and Fellow Walian Brett. Much cud was chewed and we managed to shift half a gross of out of date dry roasted that we had found down the back of one of the carpet covered banquettes. So that was a bonus.

Can you guess where BS Des was mostly tonight ?

We were only an hour and a smidge from our next destination, Cardiff in lovely lovely Wales and a day off too. I could sense that two things were racing round my colleagues heads as we bore down the M50, what delights would the services, citizens and environment of Europe's youngest Capital have in store for them and what were the chances of using jollyjon's bath. Yep just the two things.

jollyjon's bonce, however, was awash with even more detritus than normal as this TM"Virtual Bonce Scan" shows...

- He could hear his comfy bed calling.
- He could hear his comfy wife calling.
- He was hoping that Renfield would leave backstage passes for the kids as he had promised by email.
- He had no idea where to park the Pink One for two days with or without a land line.
- His heart sunk when Tony told him there was no coach park in his beloved hometown.
- He sighed.
- He was hoping that the local sex shop had had another delivery of inflatable sheep as demand on the bus was high.
- He was wondering how to get all 13 buskateers in his bath.
- He was 70 / 30 against going on to Sheffield at this moment in time.
- He was yet to book a restaurant for tonight's bean feast.
- He was with military cunning planning an audacious pubcrawl of Cardiff's finest hostelries.
- He had foolishly forgotten it was Sunday in Cardiff (see above)
- He could hear his bed calling again...
- He was wondering what were the chances of mrs jollyjon coming to pick him up from the Cardiff

Services now as it was only 4 am

- He prayed that the recent outbreak of flatulence amongst waitresses had subsided.
- He was pretty confident that the Phantom Shower Rose Pilferer would have been caught by now.
- He was in torment too, how was he going to tell the kids that Uncle Alice had slain Dolly ?
- and wasn't that my bed I heard calling again ?
- at least he knew that his lovely Sickthing friends were guaranteed an unforgettable show in Cardiff in front of a great welcoming crowd with security second to none.. yeah at least he could rely on that.

[you've gone all third person again][sorry ethyl it was for effect]

Dydd Sul y 24ain o Dachwedd, Caerdydd (Dydd bant).

Sunday 24th November, Cardiff (Day Off).

"We'll keep a welcome in the hillsides" so the tune goes but not in the Cardiff services it seems. It was nearly noon and I had rung mrs jj, who was on her way to pick me up, I had sloped off the bus to avoid the increasing torrent of tales that were coming back to the bus from colleagues about roseless showers and farting waitresses. Seems it was still going on. I was sat hunched up against the cold when I noticed a work colleague wandering in my direction. "Hello Mr Jones" I coughed and for the second time in as many days I was blanked. I tried again and he spun round to confront the dishevelled tramp who was after his small change. "Its me Jon" I smirked. He took a lot of convincing that this tramp in a blood stained sheep shirt, shorts and walking boots was a work colleague who normally was so well... normal.

Back in my lovely bath I relaxed safe in the knowledge that the Pink One would now be parked and landlined up by the National Sports Centre. No such luck. Seemed there was no room at the inn and so I drove, with numbers 1,2 & 3 in tow to meet them. Sigh, entrances were blocked, police were unhelpful and tachograph time was ebbing away. Parked up on double yellows with the jenny belching fumes we went our separate ways promising to rendezvous at the Goat Major (Really) Public House and from there onward for top fare at a mystery restaurant. A mystery because I hadn't booked it yet. Si, Krishna and Des came back to jollyjon towers to avail themselves. A hour or so later we were primed and preened and pink ready for a riot of a pubcrawl.

Sunday is not the best time to pub crawl in Cardiff or Wales.. we'll leave it there. That tidbit is presented here for your education make a note of it so that if you are ever

The Goat Major was warm and welcoming with wood panelled walls festooned with paintings and photos of goats. A haven for lovers of all things caprine. We imbibed and spirits rose. What did the rest of the gang get up to (?). As a pointer of things to come that night we were approached by staff who enquired "Are you with Alice Cooper ?", "Yes" I had no problem in replying in the affirmative. Everyone seemed delighted with this news and photos were taken to commemorate our visit. Relatively well oiled we all adjourned for some fine tucker in the Nobel House.

We had a great time at this Chinese Emporium who provided us with some excellent nosh and kept the old fermented arriving at a steady pace. It became apparent once again that we had been "recognised". I am not ashamed to say that I assumed the mantle of Tour Manager and Toastmaster, roaring out increasingly stentorian toasts as the evening progressed, sometimes even twice for the cameras.

On one of many return trips from the lavatories two gentlemen (who on the strength of our visit went to the Cooper show next day) begged me to see if a photo could be had with him. I was polite but firm and explained that we were out relaxing but I would see what I could do. The him of course was Mr Crowe, they must have thought that he was, well you can guess. I never said he was and I never said he wasn't. Like any self respecting Tour Manager / Personal Assistant I waited for Mr Crowe to finish his Octopus Delight and then ushered him over to meet his two lovely new fans for photos and handshakes. It made their night and Mr Crowe seemed well chuffed. (Mr Crowe had previously given me an undertaking not to speak to them and spoil the illusion :)

Now I ask you had we done anything wrong ? I think not. Other buskateers were slightly more uncomfortable with our pretence.

The floodgates did kind of open however as several other guests plucked up the courage to come find out who were. Even cleaver wielding staff came out to take a squint at the Alice Cooper Party who had visited with them that night.

Replete to the gills we left and made our own ways back to the Pink One. One of our number was very obviously missing from the Bus that night as he had forsaken the delights of sleeping in a damp coffin for the hospitality that a night at home could offer. [Lightweight].

END OF PART THREE

PART 4.

Monday November 25th November Cardiff

Well far too much time has passed since November and an imbibing Christmas has left me punch-drunk but still it is beholding on me to finish this the final chapter of the Sickbus Chronicles tome for once and for all. The memories of the tour are no longer clarion but with my notebook and pedantic proofreader I shall not falter.

They say [who does ? - Ethyl] that watching Alice Cooper is a peculiarly unique experience, where one sees horror, the other sees entertainment. Where one thrives on violence the other baulks from it. So it was to be with the continuing Cardiff experience. Ever the journo I feel obliged to give a balanced view of this day in particular as I hope the next few paragraphs will show.

Batteries recharged and with appropriate downsized luggage I rejoined the Pink One still attached to its belching generator in Cardiff's now famed ad-hoc Coach Park. After purchasing all remaining inflatable sheep from the local emporium we adjourned to the Springbok for a wee infusion despite the earliness of the hour. As we tended to our sheep, Mr Crowe blew his expertly, I glanced over towards one of many sets of cold concrete stairways that ring the Cardiff International Arena and who should I espy hunched in the doorway. Well it goes without saying if you have been with us since the start of this diatribe you'll know. So I shant say. I am obliged at this point for added colour to say that friend of the bus, Mr Youngman, was already in the alehouse too and was hitting the sauce. This may help to explain his unique behaviour later that day. Read on and see if you agree. After several potions I joined the queue cognisant of the fact that the only place to see Mr Cooper in your home town is from the front. Besides I was to be joined that night, by numbers 1 & 2 from the son department and no 1 from the daughter department, although the less said about her the better. My long suffering other half was also in attendance but had wisely decided to park herself with Mrs Trustram, D at the rear of the auditorium,

skillfully avoiding any potential gallimaufry that might ensue.

The early security signs were not good as we were pushed hither and thither and invited to queue, there, no there, no down there, no not on that step. But promptly at six we entered the CIA and ran to front and centre where the lovely Mr F and I braced ourselves either side of the kids ready for the night's festivities. The crowd started to simmer as we once again endured the support monsterettes but I was having a blast vicariously enjoying the beaming smiles of the kids as security plied them with water and all the shiny baubles that kept getting winged stagewards. And then it was Mr Cooper time. This was gonna be a hot one chaps as already a putrid sweat laden cloud hung over the throng.

To a rambunctious cacophony the deathly black curtains parted and there stood aloft were Pat and his young helper, gong thwacker in hand. The kids waved their inflatable companions in salute and we were off... Mr Cooper's fettle was in fine form that night and then it happened. Some reprobate winged his pint stagewards striking the great man who wheeled round and fixed the ingrate with the most Mephistophelian, accursed, atrocious, brutish, cloven-footed, cursed, damnable, demoniac, demonic, detestable, diabolic, diabolical, evil, execrable, fiendish, hellborn, hellish, infernal, iniquitous, nefarious, satanic, serpentine, unhallowed and villainous glance that I had ever seen. A chill ran down my spine, even in all that heat, as we were treated to one of the most singularly vicious Alice performances I can remember. Even the kids sensed it and they wisely lowered their sheep out of Mr C's eyeline.

O dear o dear Alice was not a happy chappy, several low lifes sensing this decided to surf stagewards to have fisticuffs with the great man. One geezer did nearly make it until security in a rare lucid moment took control of matters and frogmarched him away. Not too successfully it would seem because seconds later there he was again straining to mount the podium. This kind of set the tone for the rest of the performance and pimply youths quickly realised they could crowd surf and then get back in the crowd for afters. The security really were a shambles here. Chuck the proles out in future chaps ? The kids were safe as houses all along protected by Mr F and me throughout as we skillfully practiced the duck and lean protective crowd canopy device each time a carcass headed our way. Fortunately for us, but unfortunately for other buskateers, their sense of direction was poor as time after time they avoided us and chose instead to kick the living bejeebers out the the barrier life forms either side of us. This was indeed one of the most kicking shows of the tour. As Mr Forsyth ably commented after the show, "I'll never forget this one - my guardian role and watching Alice wanting a fight - it was edgy".

A recooperated Alice in the second half allowed us time to brace ourselves before the undoubted push that was bound to come when Lost in America and Poison kicked in. The crowd was indeed wild by now and despite several aborted attacks our they shall not pass barrier held firm, the kids were loving it. Such was the pressure though that poor old Dee (who had earlier approached me and given me a newspaper clipping about a geezer who was selling his gaff with a sheep included in the price) was moments away from fainting but did seem to perk up later after a water infusion. It did turn out however that she had incurred three cracked ribs for her troubles. I do hope all is now well Dee ?

In a quiet moment (they do sometimes occur dear reader at an Alice show typically during an Only Women Bleed moment) I heard a scream and a scuffle as a well oiled Mr Youngman materialised just outside our no go zone. Seems Mr Y had found himself on the floor and on his way back up chose to, well there is no delicate way to phrase this, bite the arse of one of the front row ladies. Care to elucidate John ?

Schools Out Party Time was a subdued affair given the number of dirigibles and devices that had already

been propelled onto Alice's stage to date but Mr Cooper still obliged by joyfully skewering the kids sheep as they flung them stagewards. Fistfuls of dollars came their way and then it was over. Thanks to Brian Nelson we had after show passes and joined a small queue waiting to see what was occurring. We watched a pantechicon park adjacent to the stage as the road rats went about their roadrattian business until we were wafted upstairs to the backstage area. The kids had a great time as Messrs Dover, Wright & Singer each came out to see them for a cud chew and photo opportunity. They loved it. Mr Dover made polite enquiries about the sanity of the buskateers and wondered whether I would be at Sheffield tomorrow for the last night of the UK tour.

"Of course" I said "it was never in any doubt !"

Back outside we met up with her indoors who whisked us by car back to the Pink One. I couldn't wait to rejoin the gang to hear what a great time they'd had. Whoops seems I couldn't have been more wrong. After a small after show of pop and highly acidic Pringles I kissed the wife and kids goodbye and headed off out of Wales bound for Sheffield. It was then that the postmortems began.

Suffice it to say several of our party seemed to have had a torrid time. Some things were said in the heat of the moment (I hope) that will stay with the buskateers but for balance I will report that several thought Cardiff 2002 will be remembered for a moronic audience, pissed up to the max, flying debris, crowd surfing morons, dreadful sound and the most inept, nitpicking security they could imagine. I think the roseless showers and farting waitresses didnt help either. What can I say chaps the kids and I had a great time and the Chinese meal was a good night out wasn't it ? See you in Cardiff next tour ?

Tuesday November 26th November Sheffield.

And now the end is near and so we face the final

Sod that we've got tickets for Alice Cooper ...

Parked up after lengthy negotiations in the Cooper compound at the rear of the Hallam FM Arena we dispersed to carry out our allotted duties. As part of the procurement team we bought a shed load of hooch and dry roasted for our own after show monkeyshines for tonight was to be the last night on the Pink One for those of a northern persuasion who were scheduled to decamp in the wee small hours. Transportation logistical difficulties meant we had to push the booze laden trolley back through a large crowd of Sheffield shoppers who scoffed at our steering proficiency. Once offloaded the trolley was placed by one of the Arena's many doors as a decoy and we, Mr F & I, went off in search of a drinkie and some hot food as we had come over all esurient. We dined on mexican delights and were joined by Messrs O, F & H and in a rare moment away from the queue the QQ herself for afternoon drinkiepoos.

For the ninth time on the tour we were once again to be found front and centre on the barrier despite some initial bizarre security waylaying tactics. Seems the barrier had once again received a fresh coat of paint and was tacky. Alice was to show his amazement at our efforts twice that night. Firstly we received a name check during Department of Youth "And we've never heard of Billy Sunday, Damon Runyon, Sickthings or couth" said Alice and pointed a gnarly digit at us all. As a prelude to the second "moment" it seems that Ren was dispatched along the front barrier to determine our lavatorial fitness and partially satisfied he proffered 13 VIP after shows to us as it seemed the Master wanted to take an even closer look at this strange Sickbussian variety of UK Cooper fan. Who were we to let the man down ?

Alice seemed quite taken aback when all 13 of us traipsed into his dressing room. We queued up (yep we

are experts at that) as Alice signed an item for us all. I got our mutual strangulation photo from last years pow wow signed, others got tshirts and cds signed and I even saw a Christmas Card and Birthday Card get the Cooper treatment.

As we all hovered round Alice for the obligatory team photo I seized my chance. I sidled crustacean like up to the man and just before the flash flashed I hissed in Alice's nearest ear. "You killed my sheep Dolly". Its fair to say he was slightly taken aback by this strange course of events and tried to edge away. Fortunately his way was blocked by fellow buskateers. He was trapped so I persisted "You killed Dolly my inflatable Ovine in Bournemouth last week - what do you have to say for yourself !" "Aah it was you" he riposted. "I didn't understand the significance of the sheep until after that show when Pete (Freisen) told me a particularly disturbing story about a sheep on the edge of a cliff - you're sick !" There was an enormous flash and we were once again (do you remember this photo from last year don't you) partly blinded. Being called sick to my face by Alice Cooper I took as an enormous compliment (anyone in or out of their right mind would, wouldn't they ?) that obviously made me grin because what could have been an ugly international incident was instantly diffused. Mr Forsyth sensing my relief suggested to Alice that maybe he might like to use the murder of Dolly instead of the Chicken incident the next time he met the press. Alice graciously declined saying "O no I think I'll leave that for Marilyn !"

It seems I wasn't the only buskateer to verbally harass Alice either as Jackboot Jill took the opportunity to give Alice an impromptu German pronunciation lesson re: Mein Kampf. Alice finally thanked us all for doing all the shows and after a prevalence of hand shaking we were back in the corridor. O bugger I exclaimed realising I'd left my coat in the dressing room I went back in whence we'd come. The look on Alice's face when the mad sheep dude from Wales hove back into view was a picture. I grabbed my coat and left with Alice's audible sigh of relief echoing in my ear.

Ensnconced back in a beer soaked anteroom we sat there well shagged out but were visited by many of the band who wanted to press flesh and make sure we were not going to any of the German shows. Mr Zag appeared first and winced when he saw us. Mr Wright said he had been stuck in a Groundhog Day type fiasco for the past nine shows never knowing where the hell he was. Mr Dover skipped over and hugged me calling out "woah its the sickest of sickthings". Dear Reader I have to say that in all actuality that is unlikely to be true (although I'd like to think I was in the top 7000 of the European Division). Mr Dover was presented with a very fetching hat and set of gloves (age 7/8 female) by Krishna F, the former instantly jammed the fine wollen delights on his digits for a furious foto frenzy.

Back on the Sickbus it was party time as we all quaffed the old fermented a furious Karaoke session ensued although two of our guests superfan Mr Michael and Pat Novak both managed to stay downstairs and avoid having to perform. As the time came for Si, Bill, Adrian, Annie, Chris & AJ to disembark we gathered in the top lounge for a particularly moving rendition of our anthem Sickthings. Emotions were running high by now and several people were seen to be just a tadde damp in the ocular department. I hate long drawn out goodbyes but after a series of group hugs coupled with a sworn oath to do it all again soon, Tony, thankfully, fired up the Pink One for the journey south to Kings Cross and journey's end for the remaining buskateers saving me the bother of enduring anymore sentimental tripe...

Wednesday November 27th November London and homeward to Cardiff.

I awoke just as a shaft of early morning London sunlight pierced one of the two windows I had on the Pink One and temporarily blinded me. It was quiet, too quiet. I strained my one remaining functioning ear listening for clues it was ominously quiet. There was no dawn chorus of Scottish snoring or Staines

rasping to wake me. And then I remembered they were gone marooned up north somewhere. The engine was off but down below Tony was busily Hoovering up and filling several black bags with all sorts of flotsam and jetsam that the Sickbusketeers had generated. We kindly left a rather cheeky little bottle of Venezuelan Amontillado in the fridge for the Commitments for they were to endure the Pink One next. Tony seemed far too cheerful when I disembarked. We (Jackboot Jill, George, B & L, Desmond, Krishna Forsyth & I) sat automaton like in a McDonalds (thats how vacant we felt) as our former pink home sped away without us ! Sensing an emotional outburst I slipped away into Kings Cross concourse headed for Cardiff and home, and work, and bills, and

The Journey into madness was over. Had we arrived ? Indubitably Desmond indubitably.....

The Prologue and the Nauseating Analysis Bit.

Well to borrow a sketchette from the Fast Show people. This last tour :-

- Des was mostly pale
- Adrian was poledancing
- Paul was someone else
- Bill was short of a breakfast
- Lisa was queuing
- Brian was henpecked
- Annie was talking to beer in the fridge
- Chris was Press
- AJ was sick
- George was colonial
- Si was lemsipping
- Jill was tolerant to the last

and jollyjon was largely pontificating allegedly and writing it all down and Dolly was dead.

Gratuitous Name Check Without whom blah blah blah ...

The Buskateers - bless you all but especially you Nathaniel.

Alice Cooper - sheep murderer

Shep Gordon

Toby Mamis

Brian Nelson

Mr Dover

Mr Friesen

Mr Zag

Mr Singer

Mr Wright

Calico Cooper

Pat Novak

The Dogs D'Amour

Andy Michael

Michael Bruce
Chris Pavlou
Pete & Dorothy Trustram
John Youngman
Brett
The Dingles & Pseudo Dingles
Gwyneth Paltrow
Mo
Number 1
Number 2
Number 3
Daughter 1
Sam & Mel
Queeny
Mountain Ash Mike
Bjorn Madsen
Matt Coddington
Desiree Biehn
Zara
Jay Cooper
Dee "Mind the Ribs"
Leighton Rees
Andrew Clark
Darren & Craig
Tony B
Alan White
Steve Roberts
Chris Sutton
The Family Forsyth
Sarabeth H
Mary Crowe & Mr & Mrs Crowe
Tony & Mrs Driver
The Lovely Pizza Maker at Washington Services.

See you on the next one ?

Fin.

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