

# **An Fleghes Hager-Na Yu Canjeons**



**April 2011 – 2.1 Communication Breakdown**



### Communication Breakdown

Back in January I wrote briefly that I was in danger of being unemployed due to drastic changes in my department. Well, that job did disappear and I spent much of the first couple of months of the year applying for internal vacancies, completing endless application forms, preparing for interviews and researching and writing presentations. Coming out the other end of this rather stressful situation I actually ended up with a better post than my original one!

Unfortunately this had a knock-on effect on my fanac and delayed not only this zine but the next issue of *Head!* So I decided to rectify this over last weekend by sitting down and trying to write this thing in almost one sitting. After all how hard can it be? I already have a template to follow, so all I need to do is stick a new photo on the front, write some meaningful words, an album or film review, gather up all

the locs, PDF the damn thing and email it to the godlike Bill Burns.

But then all the little problems started creeping in...firstly I had an idea for a piece set around St Agnes in Cornwall, and despite having visited there god knows how many times in the last seven years couldn't find any of my photos of the area. Scratch that idea then, or possibly postpone it.

On top of that, I've had several conversations with Steve Green about my use of the Asimov font which he found unreadable. So I then spent an hour or so scanning font sites trying to find a substitute from headings before settling on a combination of ReservoirGrunge and Berlin Sans FB Demi for headings. None of the SF, Basque or Soviet style ones I had in mind looked any more readable.

One good side-effect of my font hunting expedition was that I managed to re-discover the Legion of Super-Heroes Interlac font and was half tempted to make all the titles unreadable to see if anyone noticed. **Steve Green**

At least I knew I could write about music. During my frantic job application phase I did manage the odd music-related post at my blog ([fernsehturm.co.uk](http://fernsehturm.co.uk)). With a clutch of new-ish CDs to digest from Christmas there must have been something in there I could write about?

I did manage to find a suitable picture. This month's cover features the Lloyd's Signal Building at The Lizard in Cornwall. This rocky peninsula is the most southerly point in mainland Britain. Messages would be relayed back and forward to passing ships as this was one of the last/first mainland parts of the country they'd see on leaving/returning to the UK from all parts of the world.

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### Future Sounds: Carbeth

Carbeth is the debut album from the Trembling Bells, probably the finest psych-folk group in the UK at present. The Bells are the brainchild of drummer Alex Neilson, who has previously played with such *An Fleghes* favourites as Bonnie Prince Billy and Matt Valentine.

The core line-up is fairly standard - drums, bass, guitar, organ, vocals, supplemented by occasional brass and strings. Lavinia Blackwell's strong vocals have brought comparisons with the work of Sandy Denny but both vocalists have such a distinctive individual style that that smacks of lazy journalism rather than a useful description. Blackwell's vocals I think are stronger - they often cut through the busy chaotic arrangements, competing directly with the organs, guitars and horns, which is quite a stunning feat. Even more so when usually in the next song she can deliver a folk ballad so sweet and tender that it makes you have to choke back the tears.

So apart from some stunning vocals what makes this album stand out? I think there is a real freshness to it. Partly it is in the energy of

the performances contained on the album, but I think there is also something in the way it is recorded. All the various musical parts feel like they're pushed to the front of the mix, and while there is a lot of interweaving instrumental/vocal parts everything sounds crystal clear. As a hobbieist musician I'm still trying to work out how this has been done, but it is a neat trick. The end effect is an album chock full of bright energetic tracks.



Then there is the high-quality song-writing. Alex Neilson has managed to write nine bold original songs that while being entirely contemporary sound as old as any traditional Scottish song. Again a hard trick to do, but it is done here supremely well.

In writing this I thought I would be able to put my finger on what makes this such an exciting album/band to listen to, but apart from a few glimpses which I hope I've managed to express above, I still feel slightly lost. All I know is

Trembling Bells have some unique spark about them that I can't put my finger on. I do feel that for me personally post-*Carbeth* the world of folk-rock has been changed, almost redefined for the 21st century. *Carbeth* is possibly the most necessary and unusual psych-folk album since *First Utterance* by Comus, or COB's *Moyshe McStiff and the Tartan Lancers of the Sacred Heart*, and if you know me at all, you'll know that that is praise indeed.

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## 24 fps: Never Let Me Go

WARNING THE FOLLOWING PIECE CONTAINS SPOILERS. YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED.

Despite having been out for a couple of months it was only just over a week ago that *Never Let Me Go* finally came to the cinema screens of Falmouth.

Over the past decade, intelligent science fiction movies have been scarce, although we have had the occasional gem like *Monsters*, *District 9*, *Inception*, *A Scanner Darkly* and *Moon*. As a result I try and see anything that may have some interesting ideas behind it and doesn't rely totally on CGI effects, so it was only natural that I went to see *Never Let Me Go*.

Based on the Booker shortlisted novel by Kazuo Ishiguro, this film is a disturbing dystopic vision of the future which is firmly centred on the relationships of three friends who start out life in what appears to be a strange exclusive private school. Slowly the disturbing details of

their future adult life are revealed as the movie progresses and the protagonists grow up.

Any film which starts with one of the main characters looking decidedly ill on an operating theatre is never going to be cheery, and *Never Let Me Go* lives up to that early promise. At the start of the film it is revealed that the life expectancy of the population has risen to over 100 due to some unrevealed medical breakthrough. As the film progresses and the children grow up to adulthood, it becomes apparent that they are classed as sub-human and are being raised for harvesting their organs to prolong the life of the rest of the population.

All the main principles are exceptional, Keira Knightly has never been better and Carey Mulligan provides another stand-out performance after *An Education*. The film is beautifully shot, but there is an air of cool detachment about it, and that is the film's first problem. Despite the great acting and superb cinematography, the clinical atmosphere meant I never fully engaged with the film on an emotional level. I was seeing characters on the screen with whom I had spent nearly two hours fall to pieces as the inevitability of their situation became apparent. While it was upsetting, this was at a very superficial level. By rights I should have been choking back tears rather than being a bit sad about it.

This is the least of the film's problems as it doesn't really work as a piece of science fiction. I haven't read the book, so I don't know how much world-building it contains, but in the film version there are some major faults here. I found myself thinking about the cost

effectiveness of keeping the population alive by raising donors in a pseudo-boarding school environment, and wondering would this produce the right volume of organs? Towards the end one of the characters mentions that their old school has shut down and donors are now being battery farmed. Even so if you are going to have unexplained scientific breakthroughs that require an extensive network providing healthy donors then this somehow seems a backward step considering that sheep, water buffalo, cows, horses and camels have been successfully cloned in the real world. Given the ethics of human cloning are being debated in universities and research centres around the world this seems like a technological dead-end.

By thinking about things in speculative fiction terms I'm probably missing the point of *Never Let Me Go*. I presume it is making some sort of comment about man's inhumanity to man, or what it means to be human, or about the disposability of human life. The problem is when I was supposed to be engaged in the characters lives and not picking holes in the plot. That is not a good thing, even when a film looks beautiful or is as well acted.



## Locs

Kicking off this issue's letters is **Bill Burns...**

"I enjoyed your ramblings around Cornwall - Mary and I have managed only one visit so far (in 2003, to Porthcurno, of course, for the telegraph museum) and greatly enjoyed it. We stopped at Lostwithiel Castle on the way, but no sign of Peter Roberts.

We also got to Goonhilly (now sadly closed), Poldhu for the Marconi site, the Lizard lighthouse and Kynance Cove. Must get back one day."

Local news recently had an article on re-opening part of the Goonhilly satellite station to be used in space research which is good news. Funny you mention Peter Roberts...whenever the train stops at Lostwithiel, I always think of him too! Next **Lloyd Penney**.

"Did you get one of the two jobs you might have been offered? I still work evenings at one of the local papers, but daytime work has eluded me for about 8 months now. I'm fed up with looking, and it shouldn't be this difficult to find some work, but I've flooded the market with my resumes, and no takers. I've got agencies looking for me as well, but not even they can find anything. You can call the British fanzine scene moribund, but the Canadian scene has been in a coma for as long as I can remember. We've never had more than a few fanzines on the go at one time. The newest zine here is The Dominion Dispatch, edited by Adam Smith. It's a steampunk zine, and very nice production values.

Corflu is a fun time, and I enjoyed the two I've been to (Las Vegas and Toronto), but I doubt I'll ever get to another one. We do like Worldcons, and we plan to go to Reno. I wanted to go to the one Chris Garcia is running in California, but I can only think of that once I am working again. At the Las Vegas Corflu, I met Graham Charnock, and for TAFF, I have voted accordingly.

I think most of us enjoy a day or at least part of a day, exploring used book stores, and seeing what's there. It's an excursion and hunt; one never knows what you'll find there. This is a pleasurable experience for those of us above a certain age, I guess, and so many used book stores are shutting down.

My loc...David Cameron really didn't take paternity leave, did he? Too many crises to deal with, I guess, unless his little one can be made an assistant to a minister, you know, he's close by, just in case."

Don't get me started on Cameron...I can't help think the country is going completely to hell. So far they've managed to screw up education, health, the armed forces and get involved in another bloody war. **John Purcell** continues...

"So another issue of Ugly Children rears its head. Nice imagery to that statement.

Glad to see another issue after a bit of a layoff. Yes, it is tough sometimes to do fannish things, like pubbing yer ish, when real life issues step to the forefront and need to be dealt with. That's basically how I feel

about my fanac, even though I try to maintain a quarterly schedule with Askance, which is once again in production after problems with our home computer and lack of proper software. Those problems have now been dealt with, so in a fortnight I hope to have the 22nd issue off and running on efanzines.com and in the mail. You Have Been Warned.

I thank you and Christina for sending me your latest issue of Head!, which is currently on top of the To Be Lopped pile. It was most enjoyable, and I really do need to take the time to send off a proper loc to you two on it. As for your comments on 2010, it sounds like you had a decent year in terms of fan activity. My 2010 was mostly confined to fanzines and letter writing; the only convention I attended was the local one, Aggiecon 41, which was a lot of fun. If you want to read about that, I wrote up a con report in Askance #19 (March, 2010). For the next couple years Aggiecon needs to be held off-campus since its main venue, the student center on the Texas A&M University campus, is undergoing a multi-year renovation.

I see you are supporting Graham Charnock for TAFF this year. While there are four good chaps in the running this time, I think Graham would be my first choice too; it's a good idea to plunk him down in the middle of the Nevada desert and make him sweat more than usual. Hopefully that will purge his system of unwanted icky-ness. Then again, the sweat might make him smell more icky than usual. Hmm. We may have to rethink our rationale here.

Bude sounds like a nice place to visit should I ever find my way to that sceptered isle called England. Of course, there are many other nice places to visit there, but if I do, I shall attempt to time it out for some con in order to reacquaint myself with assorted British fans I have come to know over the years.

Finally, I should try to get on that February Writing Month deal. I love to write music, and it's been a long time since I have actually finished any songs. There are about a dozen or so in bits and pieces in my files/notebooks, so this would be a fine time to get them done. I will have to consider this.

With that, done here. A great pleasure to see the zine again, Doug, and I look forward to the next one in not too long."

Thanks John! I decided, wisely in retrospect, not to sign up for the February Album Writing Month. Now that the work situation has fixed itself I'm hoping to get down to some proper music writing. I've just purchased a Macbook Pro and a copy of Logic Pro to kick start my recording career! I'm currently having fun learning the music software and hope soon to start writing.

I'm pleased to see that **Gary Wilkinson** and I both like Gareth Edward's *Monsters*...

"Great to see another Ugly Cornish Children. Think I've been to Bude but it would have been a long long time ago and it doesn't stick in the memory. Went down to Cornwall and Devon a few times as a kid then a couple of times as an adult but nothing for a long time,

several years. Must make the effort again at some point.

I enjoyed Monsters too... despite it not being quite what I expected. The film maker Edwards has done a ton of publicity and it's interesting to see the techniques he used to keep the costs low. He cast a real-life couple to play the main leads to make filming easier and dragged in locals for the other parts. To save on having an expensive lighting set up he used innovated filming methods – for instance using lenses with a short focal depth to isolate a character, softening the background without the need for a fill light. I see Edwards has been signed up for a Godzilla reboot. Be interested to see what he makes of that."

**Eric Mayer** struggles with the Cornish name...

"I enjoyed reading your zine but I wonder could I please just call it Ugly Children? I can't even remember the shortened version of the full name, although I love the phrase. Besides which I keep reading Ugly Children as Ugly Chickens that wonderful Howard Waldrop story.

You made your Cornish vacation sound pretty terrific. What scenery! I am afraid I wouldn't be surfing though, body or otherwise. I took some swimming lessons in my mid-forties and supposedly I can do the dead man's float. Uh...well...I mean, technically that thing where you just kind of flop mostly submerged so you don't drown but which would probably go from being the name of a survival technique to a literal

description rather quickly in my case.

Hope you enjoyed *The City and the City*. I hardly ever read modern science fiction but I read that and thought it was amazing, of course mostly I read mysteries now so it had that going for it. The central idea, of the co-existing citizenry who avoided seeing one another struck me as strikingly original, but then, a week later, by sheer chance, I reread a collection of Jack Vance's *Dying Earth* stories and realized he had set forth exactly the same idea in one of the tales, albeit he had not developed to the extent Mieville did."

*Ugly Children* is fine Eric! *Ugly Chicken's* would be a great name for a zine too; I like Waldrop although his books are quite hard to find over here. *The City and The City* was excellent and I quickly moved onto China Mieville's *Kraken* after that too. When you couple that with *The Windup Girl* which I just finished last week that's probably the most contemporary speculative fiction I've read in any one year.

Last for this issue is Seattle legend ***Jerry Kaufman***...

"I am not even going to try to write the name. Suzle and I are much more indoors folk. I don't think she has been camping since she was twelve. I've camped a couple of times in my adult years, but much prefer a comfy hotel or B&B, especially now that I'm nearly old enough to be an OAP (which is what, exactly? Old Age Pensioner?). But otherwise your holiday in Bude sounded wistfully charming.

I tried out the Phantom Band, and enjoyed them. Will have to track down some of your other suggestions. I just finished listening to a relatively new Eliza Carthy album, done with her mum, Norma Waterson, called *The Gift*. A mix of British trad folk and American tunes, including some hymns and gospel (the Waterson family seems to like these). The music player then went right into *Florence & the Machine*. Have you ever seen their video for "Dog Days Are Over"? I think Florence is attractive and a little nuts. (One of the songs on their album is about how loving domestic violence can be.)

The mention of Centurion in your letters had me shoot off a quick email to Mark & Claire. I had just finished a letter to them in which I suggested that have Tony Keen write them an article about movies about the lost Ninth Legion, and I could only remember *The Lost Legion* and *The Eagle*."

Glad you like the music recommendations. I agree entirely with you (on both counts) about Florence too.

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### **Coming Up...**

The big thing this month is of course Eastercon. I'm not too fussed about the military theme and am a bit annoyed at the lack of communication after the whole accommodation fiasco but still looking forward to spending the weekend seeing friends and catching up on fannish gossip.

After that there is of course the Royal Wedding bank holiday. I have no interest in the

monarchy, in fact my left-wing leanings would rather get rid of them, but I am happy for the day off work. Let's unleash the revolution now...but only after we've had a nice holiday.

This has been **An Fleghes Hager-Na Yu Canjeons** #4. Next one will appear hopefully in May.

Special thanks as always to the great fannish god **Bill Burns** for hosting this changeling on **efanzines.com**. Steve Green provided the mangled roadsign illo originally used in my article on Falmouth and *The Kraken Wakes* in *Head!*

Any comments, abuse, etc drop me a line at [doug\\_bell@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:doug_bell@tiscali.co.uk) or follow me on Twitter or Facebook as *dhunterbell*, or on my blog [fernsehturm.co.uk](http://fernsehturm.co.uk).

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