PRESS GANG

TREATMENT & STORY LINES

Created by BILL MOFFAT Written by BILL & STEVEN MOFFAT

Producer

Sandra C. Hastie Richmond Films & Television Ltd 50 Frith Street London W1V 5TE

Tel: 071-734-9313 Fax: 071-287-2058

PRESS GANG

Take A Town

Take a town called Norbridge, ill at ease with the recent mixing of its rural tradition and new industry now already in decline; a town that had eagerly spread itself with new estates and new people to embrace a new prosperity that has never come; a place of youthful discontent and unrest.

Take Matt Kerr, bigtime Fleet Street newsman, mysteriously come to edit the smalltime Norbridge Gazette; quick on the draw to show all in authority the error of their provincial ways; quick to defend misunderstood Norbridge youth and set the blame on their elders. A man with a mission, or so it seems.

Now add the truculent young Spike and his unsavoury gang of Newks, caught red-handed inscribing some practical examples of their misunderstood little ways deep into the shining paintwork of Matt Kerr's expensive new car. Suddenly it's time for the preacher to practise, to do unto them as he would have the others do unto them!

It is for this reason (or is it?) that Matt Kerr suspends retribution - above Spike's head - to make him an offer he can't refuse. He must gather a team to run a junior newspaper where the Norbridge kids will have a better say than they can get with a can of spray paint and a wall. At least that's what the newsman says the Norbridge Junior Gazette is for. Anyway - for Spike, it's do it or else!

Take all this, well and truly stir it up - and it's PRESS GANG!

The Series

PRESS GANG is a half-hour drama series for young people eight years and over. It explores events in Norbridge as seen through the eyes of the budding young news team and as influenced by the columns of their newly founded and fragile Norbridge Junior Gazette. Each

episode is self-contained and resolves a major story. Continuity relies on characters, locations and ongoing sub-themes. The characters are well developed and sincerely portrayed so that the audience will come to know them and to care about them. While overt moralising is no feature of PRESS GANG and 'good' no guarantee of the happy ending, 'bad' is never presented as a feasible or acceptable option.

The stories are genuinely entertaining in their own right and arise naturally out of the social tensions and pressures in Norbridge. They vary greatly in subject matter, generally holding the middle ground but free to move from the serious, even tragic, to the downright hilarious in their exploration of the pain and the pleasure of young living. The criteria for their inclusion are intrinsic – is it a good entertaining story capable of a quality presentation in the style of the series and in keeping with the established behaviour of the characters?

PRESS GANG is pacey and energetic throughout, with strong humorous dialogue a consistent feature.

Press Gang

The series opens with the arrival in troubled Norbridge of a stranger. He parks his car outside Ashton House, the offices of the local newspaper. There he has his first encounter with Spike.

'You the new sheriff around here, cowboy?' is Spike's mocking enquiry.

The stranger turns and looks at him. 'Sure am,' he says. Matt Kerr has arrived and nothing will ever be quite the same again.

Matt Kerr, top-flight Fleet Street editor, has quit the bigtime and taken on the Norbridge Gazette, and the town and its troubles as well. At once he sets up a newspaper – for, by and of the children of the problem town. It is called the Norbridge Junior Gazette. Gradually the unfolding series reveals that Matt Kerr has his own reasons for being in Norbridge, that his setting up of the junior paper has less to do with helping the misunderstood youngfolk and more to do with helping himself – at least to information. The new editor has a

long-term plan, and a big story to write - the truth of which emerges only at the end of the first series.

The junior news team, on whom PRESS GANG focuses, is a mixed bag.

There is Spike Thomson, leader of the Newks and the catalyst for the founding of the Junior Gazette. He is hot-headed and impulsive – an arrogant fifteen year old, proud of his macho image and his position as gang leader. However, he is dimly aware that he is reaching an age and stage where this is no longer enough. For this reason Spike finds himself strangely attracted to the idea of a junior newspaper – and precisely because of this unwelcome feeling of attraction, resists the idea from the start. He is rebellious and often downright unpleasant – but in him there is a definite streak of decency, a kind of honour, that Matt Kerr alone recognises and is able to tap.

There is the charismatic, fascinating, and often infuriating Lynda Day, who becomes editor of the junior paper. The choice is an obvious one apart from a long-standing interest in journalism, she has the personality to deal with the sometimes fractious and immature news team and the single-minded drive to get each edition on to the streets, on time and looking good. Lynda is often annoyingly arrogant with her comtemporaries - sharp-tongued and dominating - while at the same time girlishly charming with her elders, especially those she judges to be of use to the Gazette. Her capabilities are so varied and strong, and her manner so self-assured that her moments of self-doubt and vulnerability are particularly disarming - and a reminder to everyone, herself included, that she is only fifteen.

And there is the charming Colin Mathews of the winsome patter-line, a financial wizard at fourteen and heading to be a millionaire before he is twenty-five. Even before the series begins this flamboyant entrepreneur has several lucrative 'rackets' in operation at Norbridge High - the selling of homework copies to the less able pupils, forged absence notes at a pound a time, and a specimen answer service for when the exams are approaching. Although Colin would cheerfully con anything out of anyone provided it meant a decent profit, he is so frank and open about his lack of scruple in this respect that he is impossible to dislike. In fact, he is a remarkably well-balanced boy. As far as he is concerned life is about the mounting of ingenious schemes for the garnering of large quantities of cash - and he can't

see why anyone would object to that.

And there are all the others. Danny McColl, the self-effacing but talented photographer and Kenny Phillips, the jokey but hard-working assistant editor. There is Sarah Jackson, studious and quiet, but the writer of flaming prose. There is Frazz, leader of the Setz and Spike's constant rival - and Jingo, the resident clown who keeps everyone unsure whether he's just as nutty as he seems.

Principal among the adults is the enigmatic and somehow dangerous figure of Matt Kerr; the Fleet Street editor who comes to Norbridge like Shane to the Starret farm – who comes to write a story about some children with problems and ends up saving them instead. His strong silent manner conceals a man unsure of his own motivation. He tells himself he is doing an undercover story in Norbridge about violence among children – but it might just be that he is more interested in the children than the story. As the first series progresses he begins to suspect that what attracted him to Norbridge might be other than he first thought – and might also be strong enough to keep him there. With a brilliantly successful career and a consequently ruined marriage behind him, perhaps what he needs now is a little humanity in his life.

Ever on the side-lines and poking her nose in is Amanda Swanson, local councillor and deeply opposed to the Junior Gazette. Amanda longs for Norbridge as it was before the sudden and, as she sees it, destructive expansion. She disapproves strongly of the recent changes and of the city-bred 'interlopers' that inhabit the new housing estates - and, being Amanda, born of an old Norbridge family, she makes no secret of her feelings. Alternating between saccharine charm and theatrical sincerity, Amanda is capable of causing offence in any number of people. In truth, though, the sometimes infuriating condescension in her manner is merely a symptom of a basic uncertainty in dealing with people. She might seem, particularly through the eyes of the Gazette children, to be an unsympathetic character but she is in fact a woman of strongly felt principles and unassailable honesty. For all that she is narrow-minded and somewhat blundering, she commands respect for the very strength of her convictions.

And on the periphery there are the other adult characters. Chrissie

Stuart, on the staff of the adult paper and occasional liason between the Gazette children and Matt Kerr. Cameron Campbell, owner of the Gazette and old friend of Matt's. And Inspector Hawkins of the local police force, who has something of a soft spot for the junior newspaper.

These characters, plus all the others that come and go, become embroiled in a wide variety of 'adventures'. Sometimes the drama centres on the problems of the paper itself – the deadline that must be met despite a printers' strike; school exams when the heat is on from all sides to halt the paper and make way for study. More usually it is the lead story of the Junior Gazette itself which is the centre of the action. Sometimes the stories are serious. Spike is falsely accused of badly beating another boy and the news kids suspect the boy's father to be the real culprit; a child of their own age commits suicide and the Gazette team investigate. In a lighter vein, the press gang try to help out a teacher who is unable to control his classes. Sometimes the series will veer into farce, as when Colin secures a big advertising contract by promising an exclusive interview with a mega-star to boost circulation – and then has to kidnap the celebrity to make sure it stays exclusive!

By the end of the first series the young Gazette team have turned their attention to the story closest to home and their newly acquired investigative skills focus on Matt Kerr - why <u>is</u> the top name in British journalism editing a local paper in an unimportant little town. The first series ends as the truth at last emerges.

The Future

The second series opens with Matt Kerr now permanently resident in Norbridge and the Junior Gazette past its initial birth pangs. With the paper now established and flourishing, Amanda Swanson ceases to be such a threat to its very existence and indeed the Junior Paper gradually becomes completely independent of its senior counterpart, financially and otherwise. There will be a shift of emphasis from the

paper and its staff - these having been firmly established in the first series - and a yet greater concentration of stories that centre on the subjects of the Gazette team's various investigations. As their expertise increases, they manage for the first time to scoop the senior paper. As the money starts to roll in for real - under Colin's inspired direction - they consider moving to 'real' office premises. The media get to hear of this exraordinary venture and for once the Gazette team are on the receiving end of the treatment they are usually dealing out - and not sure if they like it one bit! On the story side, they are on the spot when disaster strikes a school trip - and when one of the Norbridge schools is threatened with closure they are in the vanguard of the campaign against the plan. A two part story will cover the events surrounding an armed robbery that turns into a siege, with police on the outside and hostages on the inside - one of whom is Spike. The second series will close with the beginnings of Lynda's plans for the paper to go twice-weekly.

STORY LINES

Episodes 1 - 12

1. Newks And Setz

Into the troubled town of Norbridge comes a stranger. As his red car threads its way through the streets he has glimpses of people and events he will soon find himself involved with. His name is Matt Kerr and he is the big time Fleet Street newsman mysteriously come to edit the local paper.

Norbridge is a fractious town; divided by old and new, its youth polarised in two opposing gangs - the Setz (settlers) and the Newks (newcomers). At once Matt Kerr makes his presence felt by publicly confronting the Norbridge community in general and Councillor Amanda Swanson in particular, with the charge that they have failed the youth of their own town. The response is angry and aggressive. Ther children are to blame for their own behaviour, he is told. He is challenged to do better.

Matt Kerr eagerly takes up the challenge and seeks out Spike Thomson, leader of the Newks and one of the worst of the junior hoodlums. He makes him an offer he couldn't expect. Run your own junior newspaper, Matt proposes. Air your point of view. Better surely than spray paint on a wall. Despite himself, Spike is just a little intrigued and Matt detects this. He is confident that they will meet that night to discuss the matter further. But Matt has underestimated his young adversary and the depth of his hostility. Being mildly intrigued is not enough. The episode closes with Matt Kerr alone at the meeting place and then returning to his car. Spike has turned up after all. There are several gouges scraped into the paintwork along the side of the car to prove it. First blood to the Newks.

2. The Penalty

It is the 'morning after' and Spike and his girl friend Debbie are on

their way to school. He is confident that his vandalism of the previous night cannot be traced to him. She does not share his conviction and her worse fears are confirmed later when Frazz draws Spike's attention to Matt Kerr's car in the school car park. The alarmed but still unrepentent Spike is soon confronted by the angry editor. The quiet menace of the man from Fleet Street and some deception extract a confession from Spike – in writing. With this to persuade the sullen Spike, Matt repeats his "offer" of the Junior Gazette as the only alternative to exposure and retribution.

Now Spike has a problem. He cannot refuse the offer and yet he cannot see how he can meet the terms – how can he set up a newspaper. Enter Colin. The episode then contrasts the despairing Spike and the ever resourceful Colin, who has recognised the Gazette as a money making enterprise, as Colin sets about what to Spike is impossible. His charm and chatter are soon at work as he double-talks the necessary membership for newspaper staff into submission. Then inter-gang strife threatens the scheme. Spike accepts defeat and prepares for the worst. But he has reckoned without Colin. The Junior Gazette is underway.

3. Photo Finish

Two plots interweave throughout the episode. Both involve what the news team perceive to be scoops. Both expose their shortcomings as reporters. Only chance redeems the situation and saves the brand new paper from summary extinction.

It all begins back at the bustling newsroom where near panic is afoot. There is a paper to get out but no sign of a story to lead with. That falls to Spike, Frazz and the photographer Danny, who are soon hot on the trail of the great supermarket scandal. A new store is planned despite Council promises that this would not happen. The evidence the newshounds have for this is an overheard (and photographed) conversation outside the local Disco, which they believe is to be the site. They publish the 'facts' and create all kinds of upset to shopkeepers, councillors and town-planners. The Junior Gazette has got it entirely wrong and the anger, led and fed by Amanda Swanson, turns back on the the unfortunate paper.

Meanwhile back at the office Lynda has 'scooped' the big paper by

diverting a contributor with a story about dangerous toys, to the Junior Gazette. Egg on the face awaits her too. The man is a crank who confuses Star Wars the movie, with Star Wars the real thing!

Meanwhile, out on the streets, Colin is using his formidable selling talents to ensure that the newsagents of Norbridge are ordering the new paper.

The episode resolves when the paper earns an eleventh hour reprieve. Det. Insp. Hawkins of Norbridge CID 'phones to thank them for their help in averting an insurance fraud and arson. The photograph in the supermarket story alerted the CID to the presence of two well known villains and the rest was simple detection. They have the gratitude and support of the Inspector.

But not of Matt Kerr. He leaves the Lynda and her team in no doubt that they must do better in future if the Junior Gazette is to survive.

4. A Matter Of Trust

The episode opens with a playground fight – nothing too violent, just Spike flexing his gang-leading muscles. Later things take a much more sinister twist when the other boy, Jimmy Rodgers, is discovered to have extensive bruising all over his body and insists that Spike has beaten him up regularly over the past few months. The assaults are extra-mural and the evidence supports Jimmy's accusations. Spike's vehement protests of innocence fall on deaf ears both at Norbridge High and at the Junior Gazette. He is suspended from school and the police are brought in.

A chance meeting with Jimmy's young brother gives Lynda second thoughts about Spike's guilt when she notices that the brother too has visible bruising. With further enquiries her suspicion deepens. Lynda visits the boys' home and becomes convinced that their father is the real culprit. There is a baby in the family and the newshounds take their urgent suspicions to Inspector Hawkins. The Inspector is still unconvinced of Spike's innocence and explains the virtual impossibility of investigating the father

without a complaint from the boy, who still maintains that Spike is the culprit. He warns them off.

With so much at stake Lynda decides to use the power of the press. The next issue is devoted to the evils of child abuse – with advice to children on how to seek help, hoping it will evoke a response. With this and other encouragement Jimmy Rodgers finds the strength to admit that it was his father – and not Spike – who was responsible. Enter the Social Work Department.

(Part of this episode will clearly and naturally explain how children can seek help if they are the victims of child abuse. Advice on this subject will be taken.)

5. Both Sides Of The Paper

Exams are approaching in Norbridge High. The news kids are under pressure to suspend publication of the Junior Gazette for two weeks to make way for study. The episode opens with an unexpected visitor at the paper – the Headmaster. He has come to make an appeal to Lynda as Editor, and on her own ground, to act responsibly. Her own academic success is at stake too and there is great anxiety on the part of the parents and staff. Worse and worse, her trusty news team are beginning to melt away under the influence of individual parent power. Even Spike, though hardly an academic, is less than an enthusiastic Gazette supporter. Having suffered the lack of trust of Lynda and the rest, he does not want to know.

Lynda gives ground and seeks Matt Kerr's approval for the suspension. He refuses. Stopping the paper is no problem but there would be great difficulty in starting up again. This thought and the knowledge that Amanda Swanson has urged Cameron Campbell to intervene and order a halt and her own dogged determination drive Lynda to an impasse. It is the entrepreneurial Colin who unwittingly resolves the dilemma as he brags to Lynda that his sales projections for specimen answers in the next two weeks are phenomenal. Suddenly Lynda realises that there may just be a way of doing the two things at once – studying and publishing.

Cut to a newsroom in full swing. There are two Exam Specials to be got out! As the Junior Gazette team revise their subjects in print, the papers sell like hot cakes. The issues? Read the Junior Gazette and pass your exams – questions spotted, model answers provided, what to study and what not to study, a hot line exam agony service... Write for the Gazette and do even better – just studying with a difference. And Colin is off selling space to the publishers of the cramming guides.

6. Where It Hurts

The scene opens in the vandalised remains of the Norbridge Junior Gazette news room. Lynda is beside herself with rage, threatening all kinds of retribution on the culprits. The others range in response from a fair imitation of their editor to a kind of bewildered dismay. Matt Kerr cuts across their emotional display, coldly pointing out that they not only have a newspaper to get out but they have a lead story right there in their lap. Newspapers report the news. They are not in the revenge business. Don't they know that when it comes to mindless juvenile vandalism and violence, Norbridge is a national leader? Why? Don't they want to know why? Now's the chance to start finding out. So clear it up and write it up!

The first problem is 'whodunnit?' - it has to be one of the gangs, they reason, but Setz or Newks? Led once more by Spike, the Newks deny responsibility and Lynda is sure that Spike, for all that he has left the Junior Gazette, wouldn't lie to her. Frazz checks with his old gang, the Setz, and becomes equally convinced of their innocence. The plot thickens as Spike, now bored with his renewed leadership of the Newks, rejoins the paper, and Mark, a Newk who is furious at Spike's desertion, appears at the Gazette office to accuse Spike; wrecking the office, he claims, was Spike's re-initiation into the gang. The accusation is summarily dismissed by the news team and Frazz is so incensed that he physically bundles Mark from the office. Spike is surprised - he and Frazz have never been friends. "Of course not," explains Frazz, "But you're one of us, aren't you?" Unusually, Spike is silenced and thoughtful.

That night, while Lynda is working late and alone, Spike confesses that he was responsible for the wrecked office. Spike's hurt at being disowned by his new friends over the assault accusation emerges. It had driven him back to his gang where he then had to gain credibilty and prove himself loyal. Now he finds himself in limbo, gravitating back to the paper he has wrecked and not sure why. Too late it seems he has realised where his allegiance lies. But he has reckoned without the professionalism of Lynda. Here is the inside story they will lead with. Spike's protestations of an inability to write are immediately and forcefully agreed with and the episode closes with them working on the story together.

7. U.I.P.

In which Colin excels himself! In his desperation to clinch the most lucrative advertising deal yet and without any reference to the rest of the news team, Colin guarantees not only that the issue will carry an interview with a particular celebrity who is coming to Norbridge, but that it will be an **exclusive**. It seemed a good idea at the time and it did offer a chance to get the Junior Gazette out of its endless money troubles.

The episode is a succession of hilarious misadventures taking Colin and the team deeper and deeper into 'Bilkoland' as they manoeuvre, manipulate and manhandle the unsuspecting and bewildered mega-star through a maze of bodyswerves round, over and under their would-be competitors, to protect their 'exclusive' and keep faith with their client - and his money.

8. Monday Tuesday

The Gazette team are in the midst of a story, the details of which are not at first revealed. It is Tuesday evening and a succession of teachers and pupils appear at the junior paper offices to be interviewed, apparently on the same subject. Throughout these interviews there are continual flashbacks to the preceding day, Monday, and gradually a picture is formed of one particular boy—Stuart Jefford. He slowly emerges as an unlikable boy, aloof, conceited and unpopular. As the episode progresses the character

becomes increasingly unsympathetic and the hostility of the other children more and more understandable – until it is revealed that Stuart has taken his own life on the Monday night. Events and attitudes are suddenly seen in a new light, the difference a day can make. Now the Gazette team are piecing together what evidence and opinion they can find in a bid to discover why. While no definite conclusion is reached, they each, in their own way, consider what part they may have played in the tragedy and as a consequence review their treatment of other people.

9. Deadline

When the Norbridge Gazette printers call a strike, the press gang have the edge on their senior counterparts – the shop steward's son is on the Junior Gazette staff. Lynda, determined that they will never miss an issue, uses their advantage to the full when she finds a way to negotiate the printing without strike-breaking if only she can meet a four hour deadline! The news team works frantically to beat the clock – cutting corners, taking risks, reviewing films and TV programmes they haven't seen, predicting the results of inter-school matches not yet played, predicting the outcome of stories that will have resolved themselves by publication date, if not by the new deadline...

They meet the deadline - and renewed disaster! The whole plan is coming apart in their hands. Expecting no work and unaware of Lynda's agreement with the printers, the typesetters have gone home. The situation is retrieved again when the platemakers offer to use typed copy. It is a brief reprieve. Their newsroom is locked. They are on the point of giving up - then one last inspiration and the presses roll.

Three days later the Norbridge Junior Gazette hits the streets on time, the town's only newspaper that week, and the country's only one set in **handwriting**.

10. One Easy Lesson

On the staff of Norbridge High School, Simon Knowles is a young,

newly qualified English teacher devoted to his work and idealistic about children. He is unfortunately completely unable to control his classes. On the staff of the Junior Gazette, Sarah Jackson is a friend of the Knowles family and deeply embarrassed by Simon's ineptitude. However, when she discovers the personal anguish Simon's failure is causing him daily at school, her embarrassment gives way to concern – and to a determination to help him through the columns of the Gazette. She persuades Lynda to let her do a series of 'Teacher Features' – weekly profiles of local teachers – and she starts with newcomer Simon Knowles, hoping this will give him some 'street credibility'.

Sarah's plan backfires disastrously. Classes learn of Simon's extensive butterfly collection and lead him on to think they are interested. Naively he believes he has found a way to reach them and brings his precious collection to show to them. During the inevitable horseplay that follows, part of the collection is destroyed. The Gazette team recognise that they now bear some of the blame for Simon's deteriorating plight. Worse, they learn that he has shortly to teach a lesson in front of the Headmaster, the success of which will decide his future in teaching. They know he is in no condition to face the ordeal.

Again they decide to help - this time on Spike's advice and much more directly. The Gazette heavies, Spike, Frazz and Jingo, find out the class to be taught the all-important lesson and impress upon them, one by one, another kind of lesson - about the consequences of not behaving!

Comes the day of his ordeal. Having been assured that his class have been leaned upon, Simon sails through his lesson, brimming with confidence and is congratulated by his Headmaster. Only a moment or two later he learns from a breathless and apologetic Spike that they have 'leaned' on the wrong class! Simon realises that he was able to control his class because he **believed** he would be able to. A valuable lesson, he comments.

11. How To Make A Killing

There has been the death in Norbridge of a teenage lad as a direct

result of solvent abuse. Following this tragedy has come the usual outcry and proposals, not least from Amanda Swanson, to eradicate this social menace. Immediate effective action seems to the news kids far less plentiful. Their genuine horror at the boy's death requires of them and their newspaper some meaningful response. It is an innocent enquiry from one of the younger members of the team that points the way – 'Where do they get it from?'

A visit to Inspector Hawkins establishes that there are laws governing the sale of solvents to persons under-age. 'So the suppliers are breaking the law and making a killing in more than one way,' concludes Lynda. 'Why not arrest them?'

The joint obstacles preventing this course of action - identification and proof - seem less of an impediment to the Junior Gazette than to the police. The Inspector gives up on a half-formed and wholly futile injunction to keep off. Already Lynda has a plan; not quite the Frazz and Jingo version - 'You finger them. We work them over!' - but not entirely dissimilar either. Who better to discover those shops willing to sell to the under-aged than the under-aged?

The plan is simple. Members of the team try to buy solvents having gone to some lengths to look the part of a user. Any shop willing to sell in these circumstances will receive unwelcome publicity in a special feature in the Junior Gazette. Colin adds a typical touch – if they are going to feature should they not advertise, no need for them to know exactly how they are going to feature – all proceeds to those engaged in fighting the drug problem.

The issue ends with an ominous promise to make 'Under-Age' a recurring theme in the junior paper!

12. The Norbridge Files

Throughout PRESS GANG there have been recurrent allusions to the existence of a deeper and more personal reason for Matt Kerr's presence in Norbridge - the real reason. The junior staff are now

conscious of this and make it their business to find out the truth – like the good investigative journalists they have learned to be.

Overheard phone calls, chance remarks and more importantly, the discovery of the Norbridge Files, a carefully documented account of Norbridge youth behaviour including material taken from their own research files, reveal to the news kids that Matt Kerr, sometime idol, is ankle deep in clay. They lead with the story of a town deceived. Matt Kerr has not quit Fleet Street. With the connivance of the Gazette's owner he has been 'under-cover' in Norbridge, combining a much needed break from the high pressure news business with a spot of investigative journalism into the problematic youth of the town, and, by extension, of youth nationally – a particular concern of Matt Kerr. The Junior Gazette team have been his unwitting investigators.

The submission of their freshly printed edition for Matt Kerr's personal inspection this particular week is a tense affair but Lynda and her team are emboldened by indignation and anger. The situation is defused by his congratulations on a job well done and by their own remembering that on arrival he owed them nothing – a point made the stronger by the sight of his still disfigured car outside Ashton House. Most of all they are soothed by his first admission that he is proud of them.

Whatever the team may have felt that day when they presented their *coup de grace*, they leave Matt Kerr's office aware that his imminent return to Fleet Street makes their prospect a bleak one. What price now their survival with Amanda Swanson in the wings? They make their fears and feelings clear enough but his departure takes place as planned.

Some days later and against a background of gloom at the Junior Gazette, a familiar red car is seen driving into Norbridge. Just as before, it parks outside Ashton House and Matt Kerr strides up the steps. A voice calls out, hopeful rather than truculent, 'You still the sheriff around here?' Matt turns and looks at Spike. 'Sure am,' he says.