

Athens Adventure – Day 3

...at least Alex had arrived, but Freddy...

...seemed to be ill...

‘Don’t worry’, said Freddy, smiling, ‘It means ‘Hello Alex, how are you? I like Greece!’

‘Konnichiwa Freddy, Genki desu’, replied Alex, in Japanese.

‘Woah! That’s enough of that, we need to get out!’ said Hardy, as the bus pulled into the airport bus station. They struggled with their various cases, rucksacks, and bags, fought through the crowds in the terminal building, and found their way to the check-in area.

‘Now, lads and lasses, stick together’, called out Mr Andrews, waving a tattered brown clipboard over his head, ‘we all want to end up in Athens, remember!’. He marched off towards the banks of check-in desks, followed by the eight members of the Lancaster Road team.

The scene in the check-in hall was utterly bewildering, and Mr Andrews, who was nominally in charge of the group, was starting to look uneasy. Freddy dropped his bag. Wil, who had been playing hide-and-seek with Michael, wisely decided that it would be better to stick with the group. The sounds of chanting coming from along the hall were both exciting and slightly worrying. A chorus of ‘You’ll Never Walk Alone’ confirmed that the group were Liverpool fans. As the chorus started, two fans trying to get through the melée started to push. Mr Andrews looked round. A large bald-headed Liverpool fan butted into him from one side, and a small long-haired Liverpool fan pushed him from the other side. They were only steadying themselves. Sorry mate, they both said.

‘I could really do with sitting down...’ said Mr Andrews, sounding a little desperate.

‘Don’t worry, Mr Andrews, it’s just over here’, said Freddy in an attempt to reassure him. But in fact they were lost. There were about five hundred check-in desks, fifty different airlines, and five million people in the way.

‘Here we are!’ Hardy said, as they finally arrived in the zone where their airline was located.

The sign above the desk said

EasyAir!The easy way to get in the air

Beneath the sign was a picture of a gentleman, wearing leather trousers and a motorbike helmet, strapping a huge pair of wings onto his shoulders.

‘I don’t think that can be right’, said Freddy, looking worried, ‘let’s try this one!’ they moved down the hall a short way to the next bank of desks.

DebonAir!The smart way to get you there!

‘That doesn’t sound like our kind of airline either’, said Freddy, looking for his ticket in the pocket of his jacket, ‘...now let’s have a look here...’. As he was searching, they passed several other airlines, none of which seemed to be going their way.

Several people, some in black cloaks, were queuing for

On a Wing and A Prayer AirKeep your hands together and hope!,

A man came running past them, and dashed up to the counter of

Air Today, Gone TomorrowSpecialists in short breaks,

but then obviously decided he didn’t want a short break after all. The final desks they passed were for

HerethereandeverywhereAIRRandom trips – not for the faint-hearted,

who promised their customers a ‘unique flying experience. We do the take-off, YOU do the landing!’. Definitely not for the faint-hearted, and not for Lancaster Road either. Finally, Freddy pulled the ticket out of his pocket and examined it.

Air Greece Check-in desks 400-450, Zone G, last check-in 1600.

Not surprisingly, the desk they had to go to was the one surrounded by Liverpool fans. A huge throbbing mass of humanity. Sweat pouring from every pore. Singing. Chanting. You’ll Never Walk Alone. We are the Champions. I’ll be your long-haired lover from Liverpool.

‘Here we are everyone’, puffed Mr Andrews, ‘now, get in the queue!’. They lined up behind the mass ranks of the Kop.

Wil stared up at the sign above the ranks of desks. Air Greece. Slip down to Athens for the weekend! He thought for a moment. Wow, we’re actually going to Greece, to Athens, to the Champions League FINAL!’

Time passed, they queued.

They fidgeted, and queued.

Wil and Michael ran around a bit. Then queued.

They joined in the chanting a bit. And queued.

They got to the front of the queue and checked in. They headed for security.

And queued.

Too much queuing, too much to-ing (and fro-ing), we need rescuing (thought Freddy), I wish we were doing (something) (thought Wil), fans booing, a mother cooing (over her baby) and a cat mewing in the corner doing (the crossword).

Through security though, and to the plane.

The flight passed pleasantly enough, with most of the players, except Hardy, dozing or snoozing on and off. Hardy, with no-one to talk to, occupied himself by purchasing the entire range of the duty-free toys for sale on board, and by trying to persuade the rest of the team to carry them for him.

Being the youngest passengers on the plane, the Lancaster Road players were allowed off the plane first. As they walked wearily down the steps, a small party of children, dressed in traditional Greek costume, were waiting for them.

The first boy was wearing a golden sheepskin.

‘Welcome, Liverpool fans, I am Jason!’

The second boy, muscles rippling underneath his shirt, said,

‘Greetings, Scousers, I am Heracles!’

A petite, pretty girl stepped forward, and handed a bunch of flowers to Clara, who did her best to remain polite.

‘I am Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty!’

Finally, a tall boy stepped up and said,

‘My name is Zeus, I am king of all the gods, and these are my people, you are most welcome!’ he motioned expansively at the group of children behind him, who spontaneously broke into song,

Welcome to Greece! We greet you all in peace! Our joy will never cease but Don’t mess with our police!

Freddy found himself bowing slightly in acknowledgement of the greeting. As he did so, he felt a tugging at his arm. It was his brother.

‘Did you see that, at the back...?’ said Wil, pointing towards a miserable-looking girl at the back of the group.

‘Don’t point!’ said Freddy quickly, pushing his brother’s arm down, ‘where?’

‘Over there, that girl with the straggly hair...what...it seems to be...mmmm...moving...!’

Freddy squinted in the bright sunshine and looked towards the group. Sure enough, right at the back, a girl with strange staring eyes, her hair, a tangled mass of writhing...somethings.
