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From The Times

November 5, 2008

## People: Brian Blessed, the Dalai Lama, Dolly Parton, Robert Peston, Jane Fonda, Damian Lewis, Elle Macpherson

Jack Malvern

### A Blessed sparring partner in the Dalai Lama

Until today there were only two facts one needed to know about Brian Blessed: that he once tried to climb Mount Everest in a woolly jumper and that in *Flash Gordon* he said, very loudly: "Dive!"

A third mandatory piece of trivia has arisen, however, in the *Harrow Leader*. He has exchanged punches with the Dalai Lama.

"We both share a passion for boxing," the bearded titan explains, "which surprises people, given that he's a Buddhist. Nobody believes me when I tell them that we used to do a little bit of light sparring.

"We met years ago during one of my expeditions and spent a few days together and became great friends. He's my age, and when he was declared a God King as a boy, I was swimming in the canal in South Yorkshire." Their first encounter took place immediately before the actor's first attempt on Everest, when His Holiness blessed Blessed. They exchanged telephone numbers and have remained in contact. "It's lovely to get a call from a man like that," Blessed adds. He did not elaborate on whether it was he or His Holiness who came off better. It is tempting to suggest that the Lama started it.

In what could be described as an irresistible force meeting a pair of immovable objects, Google is doing battle with Dolly Parton. The country singer is concerned that the internet giant's plans for using a chunk of the radio spectrum could interfere with wireless microphones that she uses during live performances. She is particularly worried that it may cause blasts of static during her forthcoming Broadway show, *9 to 5: The Musical*. Surely tumbling out of bed, stumbling to the kitchen and pouring oneself a cup of ambition is already difficult enough?


Lord Peston leapt to the defence of journalists in a House of Lords debate into Treasury leaks to the BBC. "Perfectly legitimate," remarked the peer, whose son happens to be Robert Peston, the Beeb's business editor and Lego man lookalike. "Just excellent journalists doing their job properly."

### The Face Jane Fonda

Will she never rest? The double-jointed, born-again, formerly anorexic pioneer of the zero-gravity striptease is back on stage, 46 years after her last appearance on Broadway. The actress, 70, who caught the public's attention when she starred as the eponymous space cadet in *Barbarella*, will appear as Katherine Brandt, a musicologist with a passion for Ludwig van Beethoven, in *33 Variations*. The play, by Moisés Kaufman, tells the story of the composer's fascination with a trivial waltz. Fonda is a master of reinvention. She was branded "Hanoi Jane" during the Vietnam War after her fact-finding tour with the North Vietnamese Army and sold 17 million of her aerobics videos. People hopes that *33 Variations* fares better than her previous Broadway role in *The Fun Couple*, which closed after three performances.

### Postscript

**Damian Lewis**, soon to appear as a Zen Buddhist cop in *Life* on ITV3, has gone native. "When I'm in LA, I speak exclusively with




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an American accent. I don't use it to my wife. Or to my kids – they'd be totally freaked out."

**Elle Macpherson**, at the *Esquire* Man at the Top Awards, used a new word to describe her range of pants: "Mastige". We presume this means it combines the cost of a prestige product with the charm of the mass market. Or have we got that wrong?

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