

THE WIFE VERSUS EVERYTHING ELSE

VOLUME 1

by Neil and Sue Perryman

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

The blogs in this book are presented in the order they were broadcast on British television (with one exception), and if the episodes aren't familiar to you, they should be fairly easy to track down via various new-fangled video file sharing sites. The only exception to this rule is *Churchill's People*, a programme so obscure it makes *Z for Zachariah* look like *The X-Factor*.

THE QUATERMASS EXPERIMENT

Requested by: Robert Crowder

Sue: So what are we watching now?

Me: *The Quatermass Experiment.*

Sue: I've seen it before, haven't I? It was live, wasn't it?

Me: Yes, it was.

Sue: And David Tennant's in it. Excellent.

Me: This is a different *Quatermass*. Sorry.

Sue: Is it the one where they find aliens in a tube station in London? I remember that one being quite good, as well.

I tell her to wait and see. And just for the record, I've never subjected Sue to the original Quatermass Experiment before. I'm not completely stupid, you know.

Me: Before we begin, what springs to mind if I say Quatermass?

Sue: David Tennant.

Me: Anything else?

Sue: Yes, aliens in the Underground. I just told you that.

Me: Right. Incidentally, this is the only TV show we're going to blog that was made before you were born.

Sue: Is it a cave painting? Is that what you're trying to say?

CONTACT HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED

Sue immediately misidentifies the theme music.

Sue: They use this music in *Star Wars* a lot. And this isn't live, either. This is stock footage of a rocket.

Me: Of course it's stock footage! It's 1953! Actually, forget that. They wouldn't launch a real rocket into space for a TV show in 2015!

Sue: I know. I'm just waiting for the live bits to start. It's exciting.

Today is a very special day for the British Experimental Rocket Group.

Sue: This is basically NASA in somebody's bedroom in England, isn't it? Oh, and she's evil.

She's pointing at Judith Caroon.

Sue: She's lit like the Bride of Frankenstein. She's definitely the murderer.

Me: There hasn't been a murder yet!

It doesn't take Sue long to fixate on the actors' plummy accents.

Sue: They should be having this conversation in a train station instead of Mission Control. This guy even looks like Noel Coward; he's wearing a cravat and everything. All he needs is a pipe.

"This guy" is, of course, Professor Bernard Quatermass. I wonder if he reminds her of William Hartnell's Doctor.

Sue: Not really. He's a lot more laid back. Look, he's giving his colleague a friendly pat on the shoulder. He seems nice.

After establishing that The Quatermass Experiment is basically Apollo 13 meets Brief Encounter, Sue asks the next obvious question:

Sue: Does the whole episode take place in one room? I feel like I'm listening to the shipping forecast. It's just people reciting numbers at me.

Quatermass has launched a manned rocket into space, but it's "gone too far".

Sue: Just like our blog, Neil. It's gone too far.

Oh, and Mission Control reminds Sue of something else.

Sue: It looks like a Kraftwerk concert.

Me: The technicians do look like they're playing with their modulators.

Sue: That's one way of putting it.

The screen fades to black. However, when it fades back up again...

Sue: Oh no! We're still in the same fucking room! Argh!

And then she brings the mood down a notch.

Sue: All these actors are probably dead now.

Me: That's a bit morbid.

Sue: *(Pointing at Judith again)* My mam used to wear clothes like hers. This feels very close to home for me. I can remember when adults actually looked like this.

Meanwhile, in Croydon...

Sue: Bloody hell, this is impressive. Is this a studio set? Wow! Look at that!

Quatermass's rocket has crash-landed in a suburban back garden.

Sue: It's just like *EastEnders Live*, this.

Me: Everything was live back then, Sue. They didn't have a choice in the matter.

Sue: I'd completely forgotten it was live, to be honest. That's probably because all the actors were used to it. I bet they all made their living on the stage.

The rocket has left a trail of devastation in its wake.

Sue: The Blitz wouldn't have been that long ago. I bet this touched a raw nerve when it was first broadcast.

An old lady and her cat are rescued from what remains of her obliterated home. Thanks a lot, Quatermass!

Sue: Ooh, I'd love a pair of wooden ladders like that. And this old lady is definitely dead now.

Me: So's the cat.

Sue: Now you're just being cruel.

Me: It's a bit risky asking an elderly woman to clamber down a ladder on live television, don't you think?

Sue: Like I said, they're professionals. You wouldn't catch Danny Dyer doing something like this, and he's half her age.

A journalist named James Fullalove decides to investigate.

Sue: Finally, somebody I recognise. Don't ask me what his name is, but he's definitely been in *Doctor Who*.

Me: It's Paul Whitsun-Jones. And yes, he was in a Jon Pertwee story called *The Mutants*.

Sue: Is he dead?

Me: Yes.

Sue: Thought so. He doesn't look like a journalist; he looks like a dealer on *Four Rooms*. Or a bookmaker.

A local bobby attempts to keep the peace as the population of Croydon runs around him like headless chickens.

Sue: Here's Dixon of Dock Green again. He's always around when an unexpected spaceship turns up. Do you know what, Neil? It's

pretty good, this.

A reporter with a goatee beard reminds Sue of someone.

Sue: It's Toby Hadoke. Or rather it's Toby Hadoke's granddad. It's uncanny.

Me: Toby's currently writing a book about Quatermass.

Sue: Then we probably shouldn't be watching this. He'll think we stole the idea from him.

Sue agrees to concentrate on the programme's eponymous hero for a few seconds.

Sue: It takes guts to call your lead character Bernard. You don't see that many heroic Bernards. There's Bernie the Bolt, Bernie Clifton, Bernie Winters...

Me: This is a new definition of the word 'heroic' that I was previously unaware of.

Sue: Well, Bernie Winters had a heroic dog.

Me: Right...

Sue: And don't forget Bernard Cribbins.

Me: Okay, you got me there.

A newsreader informs Great Britain that a spaceship has crash-landed on Wimbledon Common.

Me: The Wombles will be livid when they wake up tomorrow.

Sue: If you came home and switched your TV on at this point, that news report would have given you one hell of a fright. Especially if you lived anywhere near Wimbledon Common.

Me: What time do you think this programme was broadcast?

Sue: Five-to-midnight. It says so on the clock behind the newsreader's head.

Me: Try again.

Sue: I don't know. 8pm? It's not for kids. It's too slow for kids.

A radio reporter arrives at the scene.

Sue: It's turned into a drama-documentary, now. This is years ahead of its time, Neil. It holds up remarkably well. It's very well written, too. Hang on... is that Hilda Ogden?

Quatermass is asked about his decision to send men into "the outer space". Meanwhile, his colleagues struggle to open the door to the rocket.

Sue: Those high frequencies have driven all our cats away. Are you

sure this isn't Kraftwerk?

Me: Says the woman who thought my vinyl copy of *Radioactivity* was damaged because it was "popping too much at the beginning".

And then the door to the rocket opens...

Sue: This is tense. Does an alien jump out? I bet it looks shit.

Victor Caroon stumbles out of the rocket instead. However, the two astronauts who accompanied him into the outer space are nowhere to be found.

Sue: Did the other guy get peckish and eat them?

PERSONS REPORTED MISSING

Sue: Oh, I like this. I like this *a lot*.

She's referring to the opening voiceover which summarises everything that happened in the last episode.

Sue: I wish they'd done this on *Doctor Who*. It would have been so much easier for me to keep up.

Me: They did do this on *Doctor Who*, once. In 1986. And you still didn't have a clue what was going on.

The press are all over Victor Caroon like a bad smell. And to make matters even worse, a wife of one of the missing astronauts is on her way to England so she can reunite with her husband. Awkward.

Sue: She's coming by comet. Is she an astronaut as well?

Me: It's a type of plane, Sue.

Sue: Oh.

A police constable investigates the empty rocket with Quatermass.

Sue: What are the police going to do about this, exactly? Send a panda car into space? And is the policeman supposed to be this thick? Was he hit on the head by falling debris, because it sounds like he's brain damaged.

The policeman is a science fiction enthusiast.

Sue: Oh, it all makes sense now.

And then, after a noticeable dip in image quality ("At least it's still moving," says Sue), we see Judith Caroon caring for her husband as he recovers in hospital.

Sue: She'd be a pain in the arse to live with. No wonder he decided to be an astronaut; he probably wanted to get as far away from her as possible. Listening to her whining on and on in that posh, stuck-up voice of hers must have driven him mad.

Sue's right – the Caroons' marriage is on the rocks, mainly because Judith is having an affair with Dr Gordon Briscoe.

Sue: I bet she met him at a train station.

As Quatermass comforts the wife of one of the missing astronauts in an airport departure lounge, Sue stands up and strides towards our television with a cushion in her hand.

Me: Where are you going?

Sue: I'm sorry, but it's doing my head in.

She attacks the TV with the cushion.

Me: What are you doing?!

Sue: I'm trying to kill this sodding fly. Oh...

The fly she's trying to kill has been dead for years.

Me: Live TV. Exciting, isn't it?

Sue: It's fucking massive! Are you sure the rocket didn't bring alien insects back with it?

Dr Briscoe examines the husband of the woman he's currently boffing.

Me: David Tennant played Dr Briscoe in the 2005 remake.

Sue: Well, he's no David Tennant, that's for sure. Now, if he was David Tennant, I wouldn't blame her for leaving her husband. She'd be crazy not to.

Me: I am still here, you know.

Victor Caroon is metamorphosing into something else, but Sue is too distracted to notice or care.

Sue: There must be more than one fly inside this studio. There's a fly on every camera!

Me: It must have happened when they were transferring the film to videotape, which probably happened live as well.

Sue: I'm waiting for someone with a rolled-up newspaper to come along and swat it. It must have been a nightmare not being able to intervene. I feel for them. My students broadcast live music shows on *YouTube* every month, so I know how it feels when everything goes tits up in the gallery and you can't do anything about it. It's shit.

Quatermass plays some newsreel footage to Victor in the hope that it will jog his memory about the fate of his crewmates.

Sue: This is very sad. And eerie. It's giving me the creeps.

In the footage, Judith asks Victor to bring something back with him.

Sue: What the fuck was he supposed to bring back? I don't think they have a duty free shop on the Moon, dear.

Me: Maybe she wanted him to sign the divorce papers while he was up there.

The rocket blasts off.

Sue: Bloody hell! How fast was that? That was quicker than the *Millennium Falcon*!

Quatermass shows us his irascible side when Victor stubbornly refuses to emerge from his semi-catatonic state.

Sue: Quatermass definitely reminds me of William Hartnell's Doctor now. He is a moody arse, after all.

Suddenly, and rather unexpectedly, Victor Caroon begins speaking fluent German.

Sue: That's it, blame the Germans. They must have paid him to sabotage the rocket. Ha! And I thought it was aliens.

Back at the British Experimental Rocket Group, Detective Inspector Lomax is fondling one of Bernard's model rockets.

Sue: Is this what Quatermass uses to launch his mice into space?

Me: Lomax looks like he wants to turn it into a lava lamp.

Sue: That reminds me: how come the British can afford to send men into outer space, but they can't afford to light their own offices? I can't see a bloody thing in this scene.

Meanwhile, Quatermass' colleague, Paterson, has discovered a strange powered substance secreted behind the rocket's instrument panels.

Sue: So throwing a cocaine party in outer space turned out to be the worst idea ever. Who knew?

The episode concludes with Paterson freaking out.

Sue: How long has he been examining that rocket for? He's grown a fucking beard!

Me: That's oil on his face, love.

Sue: Oh.

And then the Queen pops in to remind us to tune in for the third episode next week.

Sue: *(In her best posh accent)* Coming next, my husband and I will show you how to make the perfect cucumber sandwich.

That's when I tell her that the remaining episodes of The Quatermass Experiment don't exist any more.

Sue: Stick the recon on then.

Me: Erm... There isn't one.

Sue: Bloody *Quatermass* fans. Why weren't they recording it on their little tape recorders?

Me: It's 1953, Sue. Just owning a television back then would have been a luxury.

Sue: So that's it, then? There's nothing else?

Me: Yes, that's it. What do you think happens?

Sue: Oh, that's easy. The powder is a plague from outer space, and Quatermass has to stop Croydon from catching it.

Me: Not quite.

Sue: Well don't leave me in suspense. Tell me!

Me: Okay. So in a nutshell, Victor Caroon has absorbed his two crewmates into his body, which explains why he can speak German all of a sudden...

Sue: Ooh, that's clever. I think.

Me: And then he mutates into a giant space plant and takes over Westminster Abbey.

Sue: Stop taking the piss, Neil. Do I look like I was born yesterday?

THE SCORE

Me: What are you going to give that out of 10?

Sue: Don't be stupid. I've only seen the first two episodes. The other four episodes might be really good. Or they might be really

crap.

Me: Just score the first two episodes, then.

Sue: I don't see the point, to be honest, but if it keeps you quiet:

7/10

Sue: I'm probably being too generous. I can see how it's influenced loads of stuff - especially *Doctor Who* - and it was definitely years ahead of its time, so you have to give it credit for that. And I enjoyed it, even though it was a massive waste of time because I can't see how the bloody thing ends. But I'm used to disappointment living with you, Neil.

THE AVENGERS

Requested by: Frank Shailes

Me: What can you tell me about *The Avengers*, Sue?

Sue: Well, there's Iron Man and Captain America and... I'm joking. I used to like *The Avengers*.

Me: When did you watch it? Because you've never watched it with me.

Sue: I have no idea, but it was definitely something I saw when I was growing up. I can't remember that much about it, really, but I know I liked it.

I navigate to the Episode Selection screen on the DVD.

Sue: So which one are we watching? I bet it's *The Cybernauts*.

Me: Cybernauts.

Sue: Whatever.

Me: No, it isn't that one.

Sue: Is it *Death at Bargain Prices*?

Me: Sadly not.

Sue: *Dial A Deadly Number*?

Me: Nope.

Sue: But that means... But it's the middle of summer, Neil!

TOO MANY CHRISTMAS TREES

After she stops hitting me, Sue sings the theme tune. Badly.

Sue: The biggest problem I have with *The Avengers* is Patrick Macnee doesn't do anything for me. His lips are too thin. You can't trust a man with thin lips. And he's a bit too old for Emma Peel, if you know what I mean. It doesn't seem appropriate, somehow.

Steed is dreaming of a shite Christmas...

Sue: Oh no. This is going to be a weird one, isn't it?

Me: Well, quite a few episodes of *The Avengers* are a bit weird.

Sue: Not as weird as this one, I bet. I definitely don't remember this. What year is it?

Me: 1965.

Sue: Well that explains it, then. I would have been four years old. No wonder I can't remember it.

Me: You probably saw the repeat.

Sue: Well, I definitely don't remember it being like this.

Steed is dreaming of a huge pile of presents.

Sue: This would have been perfect on Christmas Eve, Neil. You fucking idiot. And if I was in a more festive mood, these bloody sleigh bells wouldn't be doing my head in either.

Steed's dream turns into a nightmare when Father Christmas shows up.

Sue: Ooh... Scary Santa. Definitely not for kids!

When Steed finds a dead man under a Christmas tree, Santa laughs his head off. Steed, on the other hand, is horrified.

Sue: I hope he kept the receipt.

Emma Peel arrives at Steed's flat early the next morning.

Sue: I miss those milk bottles. Do you remember those milk bottles, Neil?

Me: I'm not looking at the milk bottles, love.

Sue: No, of course you aren't. I don't blame you, though. Diana Rigg is one of the most beautiful women who ever lived. In fact, I'd be worried if you didn't fancy her.

Steed tells Emma about his dream.

Sue: Steed doesn't have any superpowers, does he? He's just a regular guy, isn't he?

Me: Yeah, he can't fly or anything like that.

Sue: So he's basically a Kingsman, then. Is that it? Like Colin Firth.

Me: Pretty much, although Steed's anal sex jokes are slightly less gratuitous.

The man who Steed dreamt about last night has died for real.

Sue: Ooh, now I'm definitely interested.

Later that day, Steed falls asleep on the sofa and has another Christmas-themed dream.

Sue: This reminds me of *The Prisoner*. Was everyone who worked in television in the 1960s off their tits on drugs? They must have been.

Evil Santa is still laughing his head off.

Sue: I'm glad we didn't watch this on Christmas Eve. It would have given me nightmares.

When Steed wakes up, he's delighted to discover that he's received a Christmas card from Cathy Gale, although what she's doing at Fort Knox remains a mystery.

Me: Do you get that joke? It's very metatextual.

Sue: (*Sighing*) Here we go again... No, I haven't got a clue.

I tell her that it's a reference to Honor Blackman's appearance in Goldfinger.

Me: Like I said, it's very meta.

Sue: Give it a rest, Neil. It's just a joke. You don't have to write an essay about it, you know.

A publisher named Brandon Story has invited Emma to a Christmas party, and Steed agrees to accompany her. However, when they arrive at the publisher's house, Steed quickly recognises it from his nightmare.

Sue: It's very well-directed, this. It's got a feature film quality to it. The sets are lovely, too.

Elsewhere in the house, a group of ne'er-do-wells are conspiring against Steed.

Sue: Are they Satanists or something? Are they into black magic? They're definitely up to no good, whoever they are.

Because Storey is a Charles Dickens enthusiast, his guests are given fancy dress costumes to wear. Steed grumbles about getting a costume themed around the Old Curiosity Shop as Mrs Peel sits on a four-poster bed. "I've always rather fancied myself in one of these", she says, bouncing up and down. Steed looks at her and replies, "So have I".

Sue: I had no idea this programme was so pervy!

As Steed and Emma enjoy a stiff drink, they are introduced to the shady conspirators.

Sue: These villains are so polite. I bet they'll be awfully sorry when they're eventually caught.

Another guest – Dr Felix Teasel – pours Steed a glass of wine.

Sue: There must be something in the alcohol. That would explain all the weird dreams, I guess. And this guy is obviously a baddie. Just look at him! Could be any more suspicious?

Me: Frank (the guy who nominated this episode) wants to know if you recognise the actor who's playing him. His name is Edwin Richfield.

Sue: Was he in *Doctor Who*?

Me: Yeah, obviously.

Sue: I have no idea.

Me: Well, he once played a giant slug...

Sue: Oh, for fuck's sake!

Steed decides to have a lie-down. Sue wishes she could join him. But not like that.

Sue: Does Steed ever get it on with Emma? Or would that ruin the sexual tension?

Me: I'm pretty sure they don't get it on.

Sue: Good. There's something not quite right about the idea. I mean, Steed's very charming, but he's no James Bond. He's more like James Bond's older brother. The one he takes on double-dates to make himself look good.

Steed's thoughts are seemingly controlled by the bad guys.

Sue: I don't understand how they're actually doing this. Have they drugged him? Or brainwashed him? It must be something like that.

Steed, suddenly dressed as Sydney Carton, dreams about a guillotine. A French woman places a basket on the floor so it will catch his decapitated head.

Sue: She looks like an evil version of Barbara from *Doctor Who*. I'm not having that!

Santa howls with laughter and then the guillotine begins to fall towards Steed's head.

Sue: That was very cheap. Effective, but cheap. It's quite good, this.

The woman from Steed's dream arrives at the house.

Sue: Okay, they must have brainwashed him into giving away state secrets. Just like *The Prisoner*. I get it now. I think.

Emma arrives at the fancy dress party dressed as Oliver Twist.

Sue: You'd better get to the buffet quick. You won't be allowed back for seconds.

Janice Crane volunteers to demonstrate her ESP powers to the assembled guests.

Sue: She's basically evil-Barbara meets Derren Brown meets Mystic Meg. It must be a trick.

And then the penny drops.

Sue: So they're actual telepaths. Real, actual telepaths?

Me: Yes.

Sue: From another planet?

Me: No.

Sue: Oh. I didn't know *The Avengers* was science fiction. I thought it was spies and karate and stuff like that. Are there any episodes with aliens in them?

Me: Yes.

Sue: Really? I never knew that. What a shame.

Steed gives Emma her Christmas present – a pen that dispenses tear gas.

Sue: He really knows how to treat a woman. And I bet that'll come in handy in (*Glancing at her watch*) about 10 minutes.

Just as Emma begins to get to the bottom of the evil-doers' scheme, Dr Teasel pulls out a gun and takes her hostage.

Sue: I knew he was evil! I could tell the moment I clapped eyes on him. They're all in on it, you know.

The house is full of telepathic spies.

Sue: It's like *Babylon 1965*.

Thankfully, Steed is one step ahead of the villains.

Sue: Steed reminds me of Doctor Who.

Me: In what way?

Sue: Well, he never tells anyone what the fuck is going on, either.

Me: Does Emma act like a *Doctor Who* companion?

Sue: God no. She'd be sitting in a corner, screaming. She's more

like the Doctor than a companion. She's even dressed like William Hartnell.

Emma manages to escape from Dr Teasel's clutches.

Sue: This is more like it. This is what I think of when I think of *The Avengers*: Emma Peel kicking the living shit out of some bloke. I don't know why she doesn't use her tear gas, though.

Steed tells Emma that Teasel works for the security services.

Sue: Oh, make your sodding mind up!

Steed and Emma sing to each other in order to distract the telepaths.

Sue: This is absolutely brilliant. You'd never catch Mulder and Scully doing something like this. I love it. It's ridiculous.

When Steed glances at Emma and tells the telepaths to put that in their crystal ball, Sue chokes on her tea.

Sue: Oh my. Did that actually happen? Did they actually just do that? Wow. That was a bit close to the bone.

Me: Oo-err, missus.

Steed and Emma find themselves a mirrored room.

Sue: Why have the villains got a mirror room, anyway? That's a bit kinky.

Me: Kinky? The mirrors are distorted – it's horrific!

Sue: True. Emma looks like Bruce Forsyth.

Emma shoots an evil footman before he can take them prisoner.

Sue: You go, girl! She hasn't changed a bit. She doesn't fuck about in *Game of Thrones*, either.

And then she manhandles another villain with great aplomb.

Sue: Use your bloody tear gas!

Steed shoots Santa Claus and Emma complains that her pen is leaking tear gas. (I think that's how they described this episode in the TV Times.)

Sue: What was the point of bringing up the tear gas in the first place if she wasn't going to use it? I don't know if that's funny or they simply forgot about it.

It turns out that Brandon Storey masterminded these unsavoury shenanigans.

Sue: That was definitely a bit Scooby-Do.

Me: And he would have gotten away with it if it hadn't been for those kinky perverts.

The episode concludes with Steed trying to snog Emma under some mistletoe.

Sue: He's pushing his bloody luck. She's a married woman!

SCORE

Me: So what are you going to give that, then?

Sue: Oh no, not again. What am I supposed to compare it to?

Me: Well, how much did you enjoy it?

Sue: Quite a lot. It was a bit too weird for me, and watching it in the middle of summer didn't exactly help, but the script was very funny – and a bit risqué – and the direction was excellent. Yeah, I liked that a lot. It was very well made. We should watch them all.

8/10

THE PRISONER

Requested by: Neil Smith

Because Sue is already familiar with The Prisoner (see the last entry), I did everything in my power to find a fresh perspective on this groundbreaking show.

Nicol: You've already made me watch this, Neil.

Me: Really? That doesn't sound like me at all.

It seems I persuaded Nicol to watch it with me when the series was first released on DVD over 15 years ago. However, aside from being bored senseless, she barely remembers a thing about it.

Sue: You made me watch it as well, Neil. Twice.

Me: Did you watch *The Prisoner* before you met me?

Sue: I don't think so. My mam said it was too weird. Although I do remember the giant balls.

Me: Trust you to remember that.

ARRIVAL

Sue: This title sequence begins like an episode of *Top Gear*.

During what is probably the best title sequence ever broadcast on British television (Sue and Nicol still prefer Game of Thrones, the fools), we see the Village for the first time.

Nicol: I've heard about this place. It was built by an eccentric millionaire, I think. It's still there. In Wales.

Sue: It looks lovely. Shall we go? Or is the place crawling with *Prisoner* fans?

Nicol: No, I think normal people go there as well.

The Prisoner explores his new surroundings, but when he tries to make a phone call, he's given the runaround.

Me: Does this remind you of anything, Nicol?

Nicol: Yes. *Wayward Pines*. But only because every time we watched *Wayward Pines*, you kept telling me it was ripping-off *The Prisoner*.

Sue: Oh yeah... It is quite similar. Except they don't end up being chased by SPOILERS from the SPOILER. At least I don't think they do...

After a short ride in a 'golf buggy', the Prisoner finds himself in a shop.

Sue: This is basically a local shop for local people, isn't it? Although I love the Cornishware on the shelves. Is this shop still there? If that shop's still there, we're going.

The Prisoner has been provided with a home away from home.

Sue: I don't know what he's complaining about. This is lovely. I wish I could move me to a nice retirement village like this.

Me: That could be arranged.

Sue: I'd never want to leave. I'd just chill out and put my feet up. You don't have to get a job, do you? Is it okay if you just potter about?

The Prisoner meets Number Two in the Green Dome, just in time for breakfast.

Nicol: Is that the same teacup from the beginning? You know, when he slammed his fist on the table. I'm sure it's the same pattern on the china.

Me: I have no idea.

Nicol: It could be an important clue.

Me: I'm sure I would have heard about it if it was.

Nicol: We should rewind and check.

Me: Ssh! This is a really good bit.

Nicol: Rewind it.

Me: Oh, for fuck's sake!

I play the title sequence again. There. It isn't the same teacup.

Me: Happy now?

Nicol: It's very similar. That's all I'm saying.

Sue changes the subject.

Sue: I love this set. It's basically an empty TARDIS.

Me: Patrick McGoochan is probably my favourite actor. I love him.

Sue: Don't get me wrong – he's very good – but he's always pissed off about something. Even when he's smiling, you can tell he's secretly annoyed. Actually, he's basically your role model, isn't he, Neil?

Me: Do you fancy him?

Sue: Not at all. Do you?

Me: A bit. It's his voice, I think.

Nicol: Are you sure you want to put this in a book, Neil?

There's some debate as to who is actually responsible for the Village.

Sue: Surely it's the people he used to work for.

Me: It could be the other side pretending to be the side he used to work for.

Nicol: The teacup makes it ambiguous.

Sue: It's obviously MI5. What's the big mystery?

Me: I will not be pushed, filed, stamped, indexed, briefed, debriefed or numbered!

Nicol: Stop showing off, Neil.

Number Two takes the Prisoner on a helicopter tour of the Village.

Nicol: There's a scene in *Wayward Pines* where the bad guy gives the hero a tour of the town in a helicopter.

Sue: It reminds me of Guernsey. And I bet you wouldn't have to pay tax there.

The Prisoner and Number Two take a taxi to the main square.

Sue: Jesus! They can go pretty fast. I bet there are loads of traffic accidents in this place.

And then the Prisoner is introduced to Rover.

Sue: They didn't have a giant ball in *Wayward Pines*, Nicol.

Me: Unless you count Matt Dillon, of course.

Sue: I think the balls are really scary, actually.

Me: It's the noise they make. They scare the shit out of me.

Nicol tuts and shakes her head.

Nicol: Killer Zorbs? Really?

Nicol tuts again and shakes her head some more.

Sue: It's absurd, but it works.

A maid is sent to Number Six's apartment with more than cleaning on her mind, but he sends her away. "That's another mistake they've made!" he shouts at her.

Sue: I don't think that means he's gay. They must know what his sexual preferences are if they know how he takes his tea.

Number Six explores his new home.

Sue: It looks like the sort of house a hobbit would live in.

Nicol: I thought every house looked like this in the 1960s. You can't move for lava lamps.

A frustrated Number Six paces his apartment like a caged animal.

Me: I can't begin to express how much I love Patrick McGoohan's performance here.

Sue: Are you allowed to sleep in Patrick's bed if you go on holiday there? Or is that extra?

The Prisoner makes his first escape attempt, but the statues are following his every move.

Nicol: It's the head from *Art Attack*!

I don't know what she's talking about.

Sue: I'm glad we watched this episode, Neil. It's basically a travelogue. I'm getting to see the whole place. It looks amazing.

Nicol: Why are the bad guys riding a seesaw?

Sue: It does take up a lot of space, now that you mention it.

Me: I wonder if the staff fight over whose turn it is to ride it.

Number Six makes it as far as the beach, but a patrol car is sent to intercept him.

Sue: This is very James Bond all of a sudden.

Me: McGoohan was offered the role of 007, but he turned it down because Bond shagged about too much.

Sue: He would have been a very shouty Bond. He would have been a great Bond villain, though. There's something not quite right about him.

Number Six is smothered by Rover.

Sue: It's horrible.

Me: It's incredible.

Nicol: It's shit!

Number Six wakes up in a hospital bed.

Nicol: Just like *Wayward Pines*.

An ex-colleague named Cobb is recovering in the same ward.

Me: Who's that, Sue?

Sue: I don't know. I can't see his badge.

Me: It's Jerry! Margot's husband!

Sue: Fuck me. So it is. You'd think he be glad to get away from her for a while.

Cobb has been trying to escape from the Village for months.

Sue: Why couldn't he just enjoy his gardening leave? I don't see what the big deal is.

Me: Are you mad?

Sue: I wouldn't complain if I ended up living in a nice place like that rent free, that's all. Even the weather is nice. Are you sure this is set in Wales?

The Prisoner peers through a window that leads to the hospital's Group Therapy room. What he witnesses in there is so surreal, it would make David Lynch blush.

Sue: What the fuck?

Nicol: What just happened?

Me: Don't look at me!

Sue: I'm definitely going off this place, now.

Cobb kills himself by jumping out of a window.

Sue: That's a bit extreme. I'd tell them what they wanted to know, and then I'd order some cocktails.

The Prisoner is discharged from hospital. A sign on the lawn instructs people to 'Walk on the Grass'.

Sue: That's because you'll be run over by one of those golf buggies if you don't. Look how fast that one is going! Jesus!

The Prisoner is taken to the Green Dome, where a brand new Number Two is waiting for him.

Sue: Was the original actor ill? Is that why they replaced him?

Me: I think it's trying to say it doesn't matter what bureaucracy looks like, they're all the same underneath. Or something like that.

Sue: It must be horrible for them, especially as their code-name means 'poo'.

The Prisoner is given a number: Six.

Sue: Shouldn't his number be higher than that if he's only just arrived? It should be in the hundreds, shouldn't it?

Me: Maybe they recycle the number when people die.

Nicol: Like in *Wayward Pines* when they replaced the sheriff.

Me: Yeah, okay Nicol, we get it.

The Prisoner makes contact with Cobb's heartbroken girlfriend. Luckily for him, she's got a ready-made escape plan.

Nicol: I'm saying nothing.

The Prisoner makes it as far as the helicopter, but it's a trap.

Sue: They just wanted to mess with his head. The bastards!

Even Cobb was in on it.

Me: How grim is that? His friend sold him out.

Sue: Doesn't that just prove that the people he used to work for are doing this to him? So shouldn't he just co-operate? I don't get it.

Nicol: Mother! The place is full of spies!

Sue: Oh yeah. Maybe Cobb defected to the other side. I didn't consider that. Anyway, I still think I'd enjoy a fortnight's holiday there before I started kicking off about it.

THE SCORE

Me: Well?

Sue: Hmm... Well, it's definitely years ahead of its time. All the surveillance stuff would have been science fiction back then, but today it seems quite tame. It's influenced loads of other TV programmes, as well...

Nicol: Like....

Me: Yeah, we know, Nicol.

Sue: It looked amazing, though. I may even take you to the Village one day. As long as you promise not to dress-up for a stupid parade.

9/10

Me: Why are you knocking a mark off?

Sue: The helicopter scene at the end went on far too long. The high-frequency whine scared our cats away, and I was getting a

lovely cuddle from Rosie before she scarpered off.

Me: So you're marking it down because our cats were spooked?

Sue: Hey, if it were up to me, I wouldn't score these episodes at all. It's a stupid waste of time.

Nicol: I'll give it an eight. The only thing that dates it is the lava lamps. And the Zorbs. And the music. And the...

Me: Okay, thanks, Nicol. You can go now.

UFO

Requested by: John Williams

Sue's never seen UFO before so I have to bring her up to speed.

Sue: So it's *Men in Black* meets *Thunderbirds*?

Me: It's more like *Women in Purple Wigs* meets *Stingray*. But yes.

Sue: Is there anything else I should know?

Me: Yes, Peter Gorden was in *UFO*.

Sue: Excellent!

Me: But he isn't in this episode.

A cushion bounces off my face.

MINDBENDER

As soon as I press 'play', I feel compelled to get up and dance.

Me: Best theme music EVER!

Sue: Sit the fuck down, Neil. You're scaring the cats.

She'll scare them even more a few seconds later when she yells at the top of her lungs...

Sue: Peter Gorden!

Sue's very first crush was on Peter. Something to do with his dancing skills, apparently, and nothing to do with his ability to repel unidentified flying objects.

Me: That's your lot, love.

Sue: I hate you, Neil. And John Williams, too. Why couldn't he choose an episode with Peter Gorden in it? Is that really too much to ask?

The episode begins on a top secret Moonbase.

Sue: Does the lack of oxygen make their hair turn purple? I hope they're on extra wages for that.

SHADO prepares to launch some Interceptors.

Sue: Is that Daniel Craig?

Me: No, it's Steven Berkoff.

Sue: Fuck off!

Me: No, Berkoff.

Sue: Their spaceships look like bowling pins.

Me: What are you talking about, woman? It's an incredible design for a spaceship.

Sue: They don't look very aerodynamic to me.

Me: We're in space, Sue. It doesn't matter. Look at the Borg.

Sue: Good point. I still think they're front-heavy, though.

Me: To be fair, they do have a design flaw. They only have one missile, and once they've fired it, they're completely useless.

Sue: Just like you, Neil.

Me: I had an Interceptor when I was a boy. It was my favourite toy until I lost the missile.

Sue: And how long did that take?

Me: Half an hour.

Commander Ed Straker and Colonel Virginia Lake are monitoring the Interceptors' progress back on Earth.

Me: (*Pointing at Wanda Ventham*) That's Benedict Cumberbatch's mum.

Sue: Who's that standing next to her? Luke Skywalker?

A UFO has been spotted loitering near the Sea of Tranquillity.

Sue: It looks like a spinning-top.

Me: Great sound effects, though.

Sue: You love this programme. I can tell. You've got that glazed expression on your face again.

The UFO mysteriously disintegrates before the Interceptors can attack, and Straker heads to the Moon to investigate. You'd think he'd be happy they didn't have to use one of their missiles (they are notoriously difficult to replace, after all).

Sue: This programme feels very American to me. And it isn't just the accents – it's the production values as well. Although this music sounds like something you'd hear in a 1970s porn movie.

I have to admit that Barry Gray's jazz version of the UFO theme is ridiculously sleazy.

Sue: And he definitely *isn't* American. He's trying to be, but he isn't.

She's pointing at Lieutenant Andy Conroy (who's played by Al Mancini, an actor from Ohio), as he walks into a control room

packed with Mexican bandits.

Sue: Eh? Is this actually happening, Neil?

A fight breaks out between Conroy and the Mexicans.

Sue: I'm confused. Are the aliens supposed to look Mexican? Is this a dodgy subtext about illegal aliens?

It finally dawns on her that Lt. Conroy is hallucinating.

Sue: His mate must have put some LSD in his space tea.

Conroy punches one of the Purple Wigs into next week.

Sue: There's blood everywhere! This isn't for kids. How come you were allowed to watch this as a kid, Neil? What time was it on?

Me: That depended on where you lived. I think this episode was broadcast in a post-watershed slot, so I probably didn't see it when they screened repeats on Sunday afternoons in the mid-70s. At least I think it was Sunday afternoons. For some reason, I always equate *UFO* with Yorkshire Puddings.

Conroy shoots one of his colleagues in the gut, and the poor man ends up resembling a slow-motion corpse in a Sam Peckinpah movie.

Sue: The direction is excellent. There's a feature film quality to it. It doesn't feel like a television show.

Conroy imagines himself in a Wild West town, with Ed Straker and Paul 'I definitely would' Foster in hot pursuit.

Sue: Have they stumbled onto the holodeck?

I sigh.

Sue: This is a lot more adult than I was expecting.

Me: What were you expecting?

Sue: People walking around on *Thunderbirds* sets, and battles in space with lasers, and stuff like that. I wasn't expecting *this*.

At least she likes Ed's suit.

Sue: He's very stylish. His look is very mod. Even his hair is mod.

Paul Foster's fashion sense is even more striking (in the Trevor Brooking sense of the word).

Sue: I love his West Ham onesie.

However, before we can dwell on that, another member of SHADO goes postal.

Sue: Can he see Mexicans as well?

No, Captain Lake can see spacemen. Lots and lots of spacemen.

Sue: He thinks he's stumbled into a Daft Punk concert.

Conroy takes Col. Lake hostage and Straker is forced to kill him.

Sue: She reminds me of Lady Penelope. I keep looking for the strings.

When Straker takes a stroll through the grounds of his top secret base, he doesn't give the monk, the Indian prince on a bicycle, or a rather large polystyrene hand so much as a second glance.

Me: I probably should have told you earlier that SHADO's top secret base is hidden beneath a film studio.

Sue: Oh. I thought he was hallucinating like the rest of them.

Straker is forced to negotiate with an egotistical actor named Howard Byrne.

Sue: Wait a minute. So he has to run a film studio while he's fighting aliens? But that's ridiculous. How does he find the time? Why don't they hire someone else to deal with this shit while he's off saving the world?

Me: Ken Russell was busy.

Straker is called to a meeting with his boss, Henderson.

Sue: It's all about budgets and money, isn't it? I wasn't expecting this at all.

Henderson accuses Straker's personnel of behaving like sheep. "Baaaa! Baaaa!" he cries. And that doesn't even come close to being the oddest thing about this scene because...

AND CUT!

Sue: Eh?

That's a wrap.

Me: Sylvia Anderson is playing a woman called Sylvia. How meta is that, Sue?

Sue: What the hell is going on?

It transpires that Ed Straker is actually an actor named Howard Byrne, who is playing a character called Ed Straker in a television show about UFOs. I brace myself.

Sue: So he's in a television show?

Me: You tell me.

Sue: Eh? Is it like this every week?

A dazed and confused Straker walks onto the studio lot.

Sue: It's basically *The Prisoner* meets *The Truman Show* meets *Thunderbirds*. And it's fucking mental.

When Straker sees himself in the distance, he decides to give chase.

Sue: The direction is incredible. It's very surreal. This must be his personal nightmare – dealing with actors.

Straker catches up with himself, but it's just an actor in a blonde wig. Or, if you're Sue:

Sue: Rob Lowe!

Straker wanders into the studio's cinema where they're about to screen rushes from the television show he's currently starring in.

Me: These clips are from earlier episodes. It's the best clip show in the entire history of television. Don't you think?

Sue: I'm sure this would make more sense if you hadn't thrown me in at the deep end like this.

Straker watches a UFO-attack from the first episode.

Sue: Does the studio film his adventures? Is that how they raise

the money to keep the base going? They film the aliens' invasion attempts, make a film out of it, and the profits go back into fighting the next invasion. Is that how it works?

Me: No! He shouldn't be seeing this. This is his life. Look, this is the episode where his son dies.

Sue: His son was killed by aliens?

Me: No, his son is knocked over by a car and Straker has to make a choice between saving his son's life and killing some aliens. And – *spoiler alert* – his son dies.

Sue: No way! So why aren't we watching that episode instead?

Me: You get the best of both worlds with this one. Look, there's Philip Madoc.

Sue: So this actually happened? For real?

Me: Yes, as Paul says, it's a great episode.

Straker tries to make Paul see sense, but Paul says he's an actor named Mike Billington. So Ed smacks him in the face.

Sue: Bloody hell! That must have hurt!

Paul/Mike grins knowingly.

Sue: Either he's into that sort of thing, or he's involved in whatever the hell this is.

Straker takes us on a frantic tour of UFO's sets.

Sue: This is brave thing for a television show to do. To reveal how they make the programme, I mean. Especially back then.

Me: They don't just break the fourth wall, they show us what was holding it up in the first place.

Sue: This is the sort of thing you'd see on *Community*. I can't get over how ahead of its time this is.

Straker returns to the office where he first began to lose the plot. He recites his dialogue back at Henderson again, only this time the scene climaxes with Straker smashing a moon rock to smithereens. And, as luck would have it, this rock just happens to be the source of his mind-bending hallucination.

Me: And that isn't even *UFO's* most controversial hallucinogenic trip. What a show!

The episode ends with a close-up of the smashed rock on an office carpet.

Sue: They should sweep that up and blast it out the airlock before

it's too late.

Me: They aren't in space, Sue!

Sue: Oh, I thought he was only imagining that he was on a film set. Now I'm *really* confused.

THE SCORE

Sue: That was fucking mental!

Me: What will you give it out of 10?

Sue: It deserves a high score. It was very stylish, and clever and years ahead of its time. The direction was brilliant, and the lead actors were great, too. If I'd watched the rest of the series, I would have understood it a little more, and it probably would have got a 10, but since you made me watch this one first:

8/10

CHURCHILL'S PEOPLE

Requested by: Ian Greaves

Me: I've never seen *Churchill's People*. It isn't available on DVD, you can't find it on *YouTube*, and approximately three people reading this book will know what we're talking about. Everybody else will probably skip ahead to *The Tomorrow People*.

Sue: It might turn out to be the best thing ever. You never know.

PRITAN

Sue: ARGHHHHHHHHH! MAKE IT STOP! FOR FUCK'S SAKE!

It hasn't even started yet. We're watching a studio clock counting down to the episode. Unfortunately, it's accompanied by an ear-splitting high-frequency tone that threatens to immobilise all of our cats. Permanently.

Sue: TURN IT DOWN!

The programme begins with a potted history of the Roman Empire in the form of a hurried voiceover, a couple of maps and some drawings.

Sue: What the hell is this? *Jacka-fucking-nory*? Get on with it!

The title sequence features gold coins tumbling through space, accompanied by the sound of depressed trumpets.

Sue: It looks like *The Money Programme* meets *The Antiques Roadshow*. What is this shit?

It finishes with following credit: 'Based on A History of the English-Speaking Peoples by Winston S. Churchill 1874-1965'.

Sue: Is that *the* Winston Churchill?

Me: Yes.

Sue: Is this what he did on his days off?

The episode begins in Britain 43AD (aka BBC Television Centre).

Sue: Look at the muck on that camera lens. That's disgraceful, that is. I can't see a fucking thing.

Churchill's *People* makes *The Web Planet* look like it was shot in HD.

Sue: And now the picture's finally cleared up, what's the first thing I see? A builder's bum!

A Roman is spying on two men in (badly-fitting) loincloths who are banging the crap out of some rocks in a cave. Sue screws up her face as a large, hairy belly bounces up and down in time to its owner's grunting. And then, for no readily apparent reason, the cavemen jump to their feet, scream at the camera, and leg it. The Roman onlooker appears to be just as perplexed as Sue.

Sue: Is that Sean Bean? No, wait, it's... I know who it is. Don't tell me. It's whatshisface... It's the Singing Detective!

The Roman is called Lucius and we are permitted to eavesdrop on his innermost thoughts.

Sue: No, wait! It's Anthony Hopkins!

It isn't Sean Bean, Michael Gambon or Anthony Hopkins. It's Jeremy Kemp; like that's going to help Sue. Anyway, Lucius isn't exactly thrilled to be in the Northern Wastes, mainly because it's completely devoid of sunshine.

Sue: Oh, I see. He's in Scotland.

Lucius wants to leave this godforsaken place behind and return to Rome. And when he gets back, he'll write a book about the godforsaken shit hole that will sell millions of copies. He may even set up a blog.

Sue: So he's basically the Roman Bill Bryson.

Lucius begins his book with a nice map, which he draws in the dust with a twig.

Sue: That looks nothing like Britain. It looks like a giant cock and balls.

Lucius describes the South-East as being lush and plentiful, the total opposite of where he is now.

Sue: So there was a North/South divide even then. How depressing is that?

As Lucius' inner monologue enters its fifth hour, Sue asks a question:

Sue: Does anybody talk in this thing? Didn't anybody learn their fucking lines? This may as well be on the fucking radio!

And then something miraculous happens.

Sue: AVON!

Me: Paul Darrow.

Sue: PAUL DARROW!

Not only is it Paul Darrow, Paul Darrow is TALKING! ACTUALLY TALKING!

Sue: Okay, now I'm interested.

Lucius is asleep in a forest, dreaming of the book-signing tours he'll inevitably be forced to go on when his travel guide becomes a best seller. If only he could return to Rome and write the bloody thing. And then, early the next morning, he walks into the aftermath of a battle between two tribes of warring Celts. He finds a mewling baby among the corpses and he skewers it on the end of his dagger.

Sue: What the fuck?! It's turned into *Game of Thrones*. I can't believe he actually did that. I bet he leaves that out of his fucking book.

Me: Chapter Four: Infanticide For Beginners.

Sue thinks she's watching a stage play.

Sue: The sort of play your teacher thought was educational, so you were made to watch it at school. It's that sort of play.

Thank God Paul Darrow's back.

Sue: It's great casting. Paul Darrow actually looks Roman. He's definitely got the nose and the hair.

Something bothers her, though...

Sue: Would it have killed them to hire a wind machine for the day? It's bad enough that the sky's got creases in it, but they aren't even making an effort. They're supposed to be standing on top of a fucking cliff!

Meanwhile, Lucius is caught in a storm (we have to imagine the wind and rain) which results in him being run over by an imaginary horse. A horse that spends the next five minutes whinnying off-camera on an endless loop.

Sue: ARGH! Turn that bloody horse off!

Lucius has been captured by the Celts. Their chieftain talks Latin, which Sue mistakes for a Urdu (like this isn't weird enough as it is).

Sue: He looks like him off of *Our Friends in the North*.

No, it isn't Mark Strong (he would have been 10 years old when this was cobbled together), although the resemblance is uncanny. Anyway, after enduring yet more ball-crushingly dull dialogue, I decide to tell Sue everything I know about Churchill's People (which admittedly isn't very much).

Sue: This was actually prime-time television? You must be joking! I thought this was a school's programme! Are you sure this went out at 9pm and not 9am?

Me: It got pushed back to a later time slot when it became clear that the BBC were actually making one of the most tedious – not to mention cheapest – programmes ever made.

Sue: They moved it to a lunchtime slot?

Sue's biggest problem with Churchill's People is that it's too educational for its own good.

Sue: I feel like I should be taking notes. Are you sure there isn't a test later? Was this part of the national curriculum? It must have been.

Lucius gives us a quick lesson in Greek, telling us that Britain is actually called Pritan, thanks to the chalk its warriors daubed on their faces. Put that in your copy books... Now.

Sue: Yes, all very interesting, I'm sure. But I'd rather see a sword fight.

Lucius passes the time by playing a new-fangled game which features miniature battles fought on a wooden board.

Sue: "You sunk my battleship!"

Lucius and the chieftain take a stroll among the plastic trees.

Sue: It looks like a 1970s episode of *Doctor Who*. The production values, I mean. I've seen a lot worse than this. In fact, if you turned down the colour, this could easily be a William Hartnell story.

The Celts' chieftain tells Lucius about the local Druids. The only thing missing from the scene is a blackboard.

Sue: He doesn't even sound Scottish. He sounds Indian. And the Roman guy is obviously Welsh. It's very confusing.

Lucius is appalled when he discovers that the Druids like to burn people to death in giant wicker men.

Me: CHRIST! NO!

Sue: How long is left, Neil?

Me: About 20 minutes.

Sue: CHRIST! NO!

Lucius is trying to avoid running into the Celts.

Sue: Anyone who was still watching this programme by this point were either hoping to see some naked breasts, or they appeared in it and they wanted to see themselves on television.

At least the production team are finally making an effort.

Sue: I think the Floor Manager is blowing into the actor's hair.

Lucius witnesses a mass exodus from Colchester.

Sue: Well, it *is* Colchester.

And then we are told that the King of the Celts is dead.

Sue: No he isn't. He's still breathing. Look at him!

The king's son, Caradoc, is played by Frederick Jaeger (or, if you're Sue, the man who teaches Frank Spencer how to fly). It looks as if he's just walked off the set of Zardos.

Sue: Do you think that other famous actor – that one that you like – based his entire career on this performance?

Me: Which actor?

Sue: You know. The one with the moustache. Toast.

Celtic chieftains pay their respects to the dead king.

Sue: Are you quite sure about that? He's still breathing.

The mourners moan and groan in abject despair.

Sue: I feel like I want to join them.

Meanwhile, on a windswept (honest) hill, Caradoc makes an impassioned speech.

Sue: Who the fuck is he talking to? Is he practising for later? Because there's no fucker there!

Caradoc wants the (imaginary) Celts to rise up against the Romans.

Sue: Yeah, what have the Romans ever done for us?

This means Lucius is up shit creek without a paddle. And speaking of which...

Sue: Do the Romans seriously think they can invade Britain in boats that small? You can only fit two soldiers in a boat! It's practically a dinghy!

The centurions come ashore on a tiny island.

Sue: Is this supposed to be Guernsey?

And that's where they find Lucius, with a dagger through his heart.

Sue: I'm sure he isn't the first author to die in Guernsey, and he definitely won't be the last. Eh, Neil?

However, before he dies, Lucius manages to write a single word in the sand: Pritan.

Sue: Just think, we could have been Prits instead of Brits. *The Great Pritish Bake Off. Pritan's Got Talent.* The PNP. So the Romans weren't a complete waste of time, after all.

And on that bombshell, the credits begin to roll.

THE SCORE

Sue: God, that was tedious, but at least I learnt something. Sort of. Maybe if they'd cast Paul Darrow in the lead role, I would have enjoyed it a lot more than I did. He looked more Roman than the other guy did, for a start. The other guy was Welsh!

3/10

Sue: Can you please turn this off now, Neil. The theme music is starting to hurt.

THE TOMORROW PEOPLE

Requested by: Matthew Trulock

Me: What do you know about *The Tomorrow People*, Sue?

Sue: All the children were blonde.

Me: That's *Children of the Damned*.

Sue: In that case, I don't know.

Me: Yes, you do. You've seen the American remake.

Sue: I have?

Me: Don't you remember? Telepathic teenagers living in a subway station with a sentient overhead projector named TIM. Ring any bells?

Sue: Not really.

Me: Pretty young men running around with no shirts on? No?

Sue: Oh, yes. It's all coming back to me now.

Me: Anyway, we're not watching that, we're watching an episode from 1975 instead.

Sue: So I won't see any topless men. Is that what you're saying?

Me: Well...

A MAN FOR EMILY 1: THE FASTEST GUN

In a spaceship that looks suspiciously like an egg box, a young man dressed in cowboy boots, some exceptionally tight underpants, and not much else, frankly, is enjoying a snooze.

Sue: Oh, *hello...*

She doesn't recognise the actor playing Elmer at first.

Sue: Am I supposed to recognise him?

Me: Do you want to see it again?

Sue: Go on, then. You've twisted my arm. I won't know what his name is, though. You know what my memory is – FUCKING HELL!

It's Peter Davison.

Me: Don't get too excited, love. He's just a boy.

Sue: His hair is a problem, but I could have fixed that.

Before I can tell her that Peter Davison is wearing a wig, the programme's iconic title sequence kicks in.

Sue: (*Trying to sing along*) I like the music.

Me: It's Dudley Simpson.

Sue: Is it really? It's the most melodic thing he's ever written.

Me: Did you notice the foetus at the beginning? You don't see that many foetuses on children's television.

Sue: It's terrifying. Especially that hand. Bloody hell, this is a bit fucked-up, isn't it?

Elmer is rudely awoken by his sister Emily (aka Sandra Dickinson).

Sue: Wasn't Peter Davison married to her in real life?

Me: Yes. Their daughter will grow up to marry David Tennant. How weird is that?

Sue: I feel like we're about to watch a sex tape. I mean, what is this room supposed to be, anyway? It looks like an S&M dungeon. Probably.

When Elmer is fully dressed (sorry, Sue) Emily takes him to the Momma. Sue is dumbstruck as bowls of guacamole, 'tickling boots' and Peter Davison being forced to lick his sister's high-heeled leather stilettos vie for her attention.

Sue: Bloody hell. Are the Tomorrow People like this all the time?

Me: They aren't the Tomorrow People, Sue.

Sue: Thank fuck for that!

Later, in the Tomorrow People's secret London Underground base...

Me: These are the Tomorrow People, Sue.

Sue: Oh. I feel like I've gatecrashed a school disco. *(Pointing at John)* Isn't he a bit old to be hanging around in a youth club? *(Pointing at Tyso)* And her hair is a right mess.

Yes, Sue thinks Tyso is a girl. Anyway, the Tomorrow People's supercomputer doesn't recognise the alien ship that has entered Earth's orbit.

Sue: TIM is basically Zen, but not as moody.

Me: Or HAL, but not as psychotic.

Sue: Or my sat nav, but not as portable.

The Momma and Emily discuss gender politics.

Sue: The mother figure reminds me of that woman in the stupid programme with the puppets.

Me: *Pipkins?*

Sue: No, the other one. The one with the terrible movies.

Me: You mean *Mystery Science Theatre 3000*.

Sue: Yeah. That one. I've also worked out why these idiots are speaking American. It's because they hired Sandra Dickinson and they thought it would be easier if they got Peter and his mum to talk like her. It's obvious when you think about it.

The aliens have actually tailored their speech, clothing and mannerisms to fit Wild West stereotypes because they've been intercepting TV signals from Earth.

Sue: It's not exactly *Firefly*, though, is it? And thank God they didn't intercept any transmissions from the Playboy Channel.

As John and Elizabeth are left to flounce around outside the aliens' spaceship – brought vividly to life via some of the worst CSO ever committed to videotape – Sue comes to a conclusion:

Sue: This is, without a doubt, the most fucked-up thing you have ever made me watch, Neil. And you made me watch *Blake's 7*.

Me: I don't know what to say. Will sorry do?

Sue: Why don't they just teleport onto the fucking ship? What is their plan, anyway? *Who are these people?*

The Momma monitors these events on her spherical television set.

Sue: You could buy those TVs in *Rumbelows*. I remember there was one in their front window for years. It was state-of-the-art, but no one could afford it. Not up here, anyway.

Elizabeth ends up on the alien ship; the Momma and Emily are thrilled when she turns out to be a woman.

Sue: Are they opening a brothel up there? WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON, NEIL?

The aliens are running dangerously low on guacamole and Elmer is sent to Earth to search for avocados.

Sue: Nice product placement for Guinness, there. I bet they didn't pay a penny for that.

Elmer strolls into a greengrocer's.

Sue: It's Peter Davison I feel sorry for. I'm surprised he worked again after this. This is enough to put anybody off acting for life.

Elmer tries to walk off with an armful of fresh fruit and fish, and

when the grocer intervenes, Elmer shoots him dead.

Sue: Bloody hell!

There's blood everywhere. Two old ladies applaud wildly, believing they're on Candid Camera.

Sue: What the hell? This is a bit grim all of a sudden.

Me: This was broadcast on a weekday afternoon. This was proper kids' telly.

Sue: No way! But... But they can't do that!

TIM tells the Tomorrow People that Elmer has gone postal.

Sue: It's basically Hungerford out there, kids.

Me: Yeah, so don't forget to wrap up warm when you go out.

Stephen jaunts to the scene of the crime and fixes the dead grocer's wound.

Sue: So they can bring people back from the dead, as well? Is there anything the Tomorrow People *can't* do?

Me: They struggle to make tank-tops look good.

Elmer heads for the pub.

Me: The landlord's cat is definitely dead now.

Sue: Stop it.

And then Sue's jaw hits the floor when the Momma decides to touch herself inappropriately. I'm not making this up. It's essentially Fifty Shades of Grotbags at this point.

Sue: I take it back. They *did* intercept transmissions from the Playboy Channel.

Me: I think I'm going to be sick.

The only way the Tomorrow People can get Elmer safely off Earth is to make him stand on a doozlum pin. And yes, that's as stupid as it sounds.

Sue: For a bunch of telepaths, they don't half like to hear themselves talk.

TIM locates Elmer just as the Tomorrow People are about to tuck

into a plate of tasty beef burgers.

Sue: I don't think that was scripted. I think they were running out of time so they decided to have their dinner while they were still filming the episode. Something to do with child labour laws, probably.

Stephen and John jaunt to the pub that's being terrorised by Elmer. It's fun for the whole family!

Sue: Is this supposed to be funny, Neil? Because it's quite bleak. I think it's trying to say something profound about the effects of watching too much violence on television. Which is a bit rich given that we've just seen a shopkeeper with a hole in his stomach.

The episode concludes when the police apprehend the baby-faced murderer before he can kill any more "galoots".

Sue: The credits are very trippy. Which makes sense, I suppose, because you'd have to be off your tits to follow this rubbish.

A MAN FOR EMILY 2: HERE WE GO ROUND THE DOOZLUM

The Momma and Emily go nuts when they discover that Elmer has been arrested.

Sue: This is dreadful, Neil. It's the screeching that's killing me. How did Peter Davison put up with this in real life?

TIM explains that Stephen "reanimated" the dead greengrocer killed by Elmer earlier.

Sue: So one of their superpowers is that they can turn you into a zombie? So what happens to that greengrocer now? Does he live forever? Is he like Captain Jack? Will he start eating people?

Tyso heads to the police station where Elmer is being held, armed with a box of bees. When the police are attacked by the insects, one of their number shouts, "Bees!" just in case there's any confusion about what's happening. And then Elmer's jailbreak turns into a protracted runaround, complete with speeded-up comedy pratfalls. Sue sings 'Yakety Sax' as I bury my head in my hands.

Sue: Look at the size of those potholes. They're proper 1970s potholes, them.

Me: They'll be slipping on white dog poo next.

John leads the police on a car chase so slow, a cyclist inadvertently becomes embroiled in it. And then, when the excitement becomes too much for the audience to bear, John jaunts to safety.

Sue: I'd love a Land Rover Defender like theirs.

Me: Are you absolutely sure that's a Land Rover Defender? You know what happened when you misidentified a Land Rover on our *Doctor Who* blog. I still get emails about that.

Sue: Okay, I'd love a four-wheel drive like that. That should shut the cunts up.

Stephen and Liz search for Elmer's doozlum pin in a nearby field.

Me: That cat is definitely dead now.

Sue: STOP IT!

Stephen accidentally steps on the doozlum pin and is transported to the aliens' ship instead. Emily and the Momma torture him with aggravated slapstick.

Sue: This is a bad panto.

Me: Oh no it isn't.

Sue: Oh yes it fucking is.

Me: This isn't a typical *Tomorrow People* story.

Sue: So why are we watching it, then?

Me: A semi-naked Peter Davison was simply too irresistible to pass up, I guess.

Sue: Well, it wasn't fucking worth it. Couldn't you have shown me a picture of a semi-naked Peter Davison and then put a good episode on instead? This is torture!

Elmer is transported back to his ship, and it looks like everything will be wrapped up nicely. The only problem is they've still got an episode left to fill.

Sue: Please, for the love of God, end it there!

John jaunts to the aliens' ship in a desperate attempt to string things out. He is immediately threatened with rape.

Sue: Whoever wrote this rubbish was shit-scared of women.

Me: The Momma is squeezing Elmer's banana. How's that for symbolism?

John escapes from the aliens' clutches, but it's too late – Emily has

the horn (and we're not talking about her trombone). The Momma orders Elmer back to Earth so he can find a mate for his sister.

Sue: What the fuck? No amount of naked Peter Davison is worth this, Neil.

Elmer returns to the pub he terrorised a few hours ago. It's open for business, of course.

Sue: The staff should be in counselling instead of pulling pints like nothing happened. I suppose people were a lot harder in the 1970s. They just got on with it.

The Prime Minister calls TIM to complain about Stephen's decision to flaunt and jaunt.

Sue: So the Tomorrow People work for the government?

Me: No, they don't. But the Prime Minister comes to their base for milkshakes now and again. He's basically their dad, and he bollocks them when they get into trouble with the police. It's complicated.

Sue: It's fucking stupid.

Elmer activates the pub's jukebox and forces the landlord to dance.

Sue: Oh no. Is he dancing to Gary Glitter?

Me: Oh God. Just when you thought this couldn't get any worse.

It isn't Gary Glitter – it's Kenny (the band, not the Tomorrow Person) with 'The Bump', which resulted in a short-lived dance craze which Sue remembers fondly (and even demonstrates). And, as an extra special bonus, according to the band's Wikipedia page, none of the members have been arrested recently. So that's good.

Sue: This is ridiculous. You wouldn't catch Doctor Who wasting his time on these idiots. This would be beneath him.

The police storm the pub and arrest Elmer. Hang on a minute, that's how the first episode ended!

Sue: ARGHHHHHHH! Make it stop!

A MAN FOR EMILY 3: SHOTGUN WEDDING

Sue: This title sequence doesn't suit the show. It should be more

like a sitcom. Something light and fluffy. It should prepare you for what you're actually going to see. This title sequence makes it look like *The Tomorrow People* is a programme about serial killers who prey on small children. The music is brilliant, though. It's completely wasted on this drivel.

Elmer is released from jail, but he forces John onto the doozlum pin, who is transported to the alien ship instead. John is greeted by Emily and the Momma, who are dressed as majorettes. Because this programme isn't fucked-up enough.

Sue: John looked directly at the camera, there. It's as if he's pleading with someone to get him out of the programme. His agent, probably.

John tells Emily that she really isn't his type.

Sue: Now there's a surprise. I never would have guessed.

The Momma explains how the aliens' reproductive system works.

Me: This is the closest I ever came to having someone explain the birds and the bees to me while I was growing up.

Sue: Why doesn't that surprise me, either?

When John refuses to comply with Emily's demands, she activates his tickling boots.

Me: Even the Chuckle Brothers would have thought twice about this.

Sue: I'd say it was for kids – really young kids, mind – but how can a programme that's this obsessed with sex be for kids? God, the 1970s were a dark time.

Me: I can't believe you didn't watch *The Tomorrow People*, Sue. You were 13 years old at the time. You were its target audience! And it was on ITV. I thought you were allowed to watch ITV?

Sue: I was probably too busy clawing my own eyes out.

Stephen escorts Elmer to the Tomorrow People's secret base.

Sue: Where is this place, anyway?

Me: It's a disused London Underground station.

Sue: Oh, so it's like *Torchwood*, then?

Me: Well, they don't own a pterodactyl, but yes, sort of.

Sue: It can't be a coincidence; Russell T Davies must have loved *The Tomorrow People*.

Me: Well, like I said, some of the episodes are quite good.

Sue: Don't keep reminding me!

Elmer tells the Tomorrow People everything they need to know about the aliens, including the fact that the females eat their man-boys once they've finished with them.

Sue: As bad as this is – and it's really bad – Peter Davison is still very watchable. He's easily the best thing in this. Oh look, he's tickling TIM's balls.

Back on the alien ship, Emily snaps at John's little finger.

Sue: I bet it won't be his finger she bites off first.

And then Sandra Dickinson channels Shirley Temple ("The good ship Cosmic Eye" – really?) before farting like a trombone. No, wait – it's the Momma playing an actual trombone. Phew.

Me: We're through the looking glass now, people.

Sue: Oh, we went through that *hours* ago.

John puts Emily across his knee and spansks her.

Sue: This is shocking. I don't know what else to say. I feel numb.

Me: I grew up with this programme, Sue.

Sue: That explains a lot.

John offers the ship's occupants a new life on Earth.

Sue: Stick them in Butlins; they'll fit right in.

Instead, the Momma becomes a fishmonger (because she sounds like a fishwife) and Emily begins working in a bar (because she looks like a young Barbara Windsor).

Sue: Get outta my pub!

But what about Elmer? What job could he possibly do on Earth?

Sue: If he gets a job as a vet, I think my head will explode.

Elmer becomes a traffic warden instead, and the episode ends with him writing a ticket for the Tomorrow People's jeep Land Rover-four-wheeled drive.

Sue: Wah-wah-wahhhh!

But the biggest laugh of the evening is saved for the credits.

Sue: Scientific advisor? SCIENTIFIC ADVISOR?!

THE SCORE

Sue: Good grief. That was dreadful. In fact, I think it's probably the worst thing you've ever made me watch. And you made me watch...

Me: *Blake's 7*. Yes, I know.

Sue: I was going to say *Broadchurch*.

1/10

Me: Generous.

Sue: I would have given it less if it wasn't for Peter Davison. Peter Davison is great in everything. Even shit like that.

SPACE 1999

Requested by: Jamie Baverstock

Me: What do you know about *Space 1999*, love?

Sue: It's set in space in the year 1999, love.

Me: You don't have a clue, do you?

I explain to her that UFO didn't go to a second series, and Gerry Anderson had to promise that his next show wouldn't feature any boring episodes set on Earth, and that's why he blew the Moon out of Earth's orbit and... Sue is barely listening to me.

Sue: It sounds like the sort of thing you'd watch. I gave it to you for Christmas, once. And by 'gave it to you', I mean you ordered it off the internet for yourself and I wrapped it.

Me: That was the first season *Blu Ray*. The first season was very dark and existential. The second season, erm, wasn't.

Sue: Is the episode we're about to watch from the second season?

Me: Yes.

Sue: So we're watching *Space 2000*, then?

THE RULES OF LUTON

Sue: This is very American, especially the music. (*Pointing at Martin Landau and Barbara Bain*) And they look familiar. Oh, I get it now. It *is* American.

Captain Koenig, Tony and Maya are searching for a habitable planet for the Alphans to settle on, because, as Sue points out, the Moon could bump into anything, and then where would they be?

Me: I used to have a massive crush on Maya.

Sue: (*Choking on her tea*) WHAT? Are you serious?

Me: Yeah. Big time.

Sue: (*Laughing*) But she's got sideburns! She looks like Wolverine!

Me: She's a shape-shifter. Like *Manimal*, only sexier.

Sue: She looks like she should be working in a garage.

Koenig and Maya explore the planet while Tony heads back to Moonbase Alpha to fix a leak. However, when Koenig and Maya stop to eat some berries, they inadvertently commit mass murder. Oh no! Our heroes have broken the first rule of Luton!

Sue: Luton? I thought you said they never went back to Earth?

Me: Not Luton, silly. It's *Loo-ton*.

Sue: And Luton is ruled by fruit? Actual fruit?

Trees, actually.

Me: It's a bit like *The Happening*, but with fewer hot dogs.

Sue: Eh?

Me: Never mind.

The trees deploy three monstrous space criminals to punish Maya and Koenig, the berry-eating bastards.

Sue: I don't know what's worse – the monsters or the music. Seriously, this is dreadful. *Doctor Who* never stooped this low.

It takes a while for Sue to acclimatise to these monsters – an elderly Chewbacca with conjunctivitis, Leatherface meets Little Ted, and the Cowardly Lion. Amazingly, she doesn't recognise David 'Gan' Jackson beneath all that fur, either.

Trust me, if you haven't seen this episode – DON'T.

Me: Whacka-whacka-whacka. Sorry, this incidental music is hilarious.

The monsters are lugging huge tree stumps around with them, which really slows them down (and they weren't that fast to start with), so when one of them replaces his club with one he finds later, Sue loses it completely.

Sue: You just dragged that thing behind you for five miles! WHAT WAS THE FUCKING POINT?

Moonbase Alpha can't rescue Koenig and Maya because Luton has mysteriously disappeared.

Sue: It's too embarrassed to show its face.

Maya and Koenig put some distance between themselves and the monsters by crossing a river.

Sue: The monsters can't swim. Their papier mâché masks will fall apart if they touch the water.

Me: They should cut some trees down and make a raft. That'll teach the trees a lesson.

Koenig attempts to negotiate with three aggressive elms.

Sue: Which tree is talking now? Is it the one in the middle? I'm sure his voice is familiar.

Me: It's Edward Woodward.

Sue: Is it really?

Me: No.

Maya transforms into a bird of prey.

Sue: Why doesn't she turn into an elephant and step on them? Or a rhinoceros? Or a fucking dinosaur!

Maya flaps about as an eagle instead (the bird, not the spaceship; that would be silly).

Sue: She's a fat lot of use. She could at least shit on the monster's head – that might help.

Me: I can't believe I was going to buy the second season of *Space 1999* on Blu Ray later this year. I must be mad.

Sue: Brilliant. So what the hell am I going to get you for Christmas now?

Koenig realises that Luton is completely devoid of animal life. "The only bird we saw was you," he tells Maya as he limps away.

Sue: That's a bit sexist. Oh, wait...

Sue has suggestion for Maya:

Sue: If he's struggling to walk, why don't you turn into a fucking donkey and carry him?

Me: Are you sure you don't want a whiskey?

Sue: No thanks. And you should slow down. How many have you had now?

Me: Nowhere near enough.

Sue: Is *Space 1999* always this bad?

Me: No. Some of the episodes are quite good, actually. Especially the early ones.

Sue: Why aren't we watching one of those, then? Do people really hate us that much?

Me: That reminds me – the person who requested this episode has a question for you. Jamie wants to know: if you had Maya's gift, what would you transform into, and what would you do?

Sue: I'd turn into a bee and I'd sting Jamie for nominating this fucking episode. No! Wait! A wasp! Then I could sting him more than once.

Me: Brave heart, Susan. We're nearly halfway through this.

Sue: Only halfway? Fuck's sake...

Maya and Koenig take some time out from their busy schedule to discuss some stuff which happened in an episode I can't remember

and Sue doesn't care about.

Sue: I can't believe you fancied her, Neil. Did you have a thing for Elvis as well?

Koenig tells Maya about 1987. Christ, it was horrible. But then Earth got its shit together and Koenig smiles as he remembers humanity's glorious achievements.

Me: Yeah, and they're all dead now because the Moon got blown out of orbit *on your watch*. Remember that?

Sue: I keep expecting John Denver to start singing. Or Joan Baez.

As Koenig and Maya debate their next move, Sue fears for their safety.

Sue: Is that tree going to attack them?

Me: No, it's just a light breeze.

Sue: Oh.

One of the monsters turns invisible (did I mention that the monsters have superpowers?), so Maya turns into a dog and sniffs him out.

Sue: I hope she doesn't stop for a crap.

Me: That dog is definitely dead now.

Sue: Stop it!

Maya growls at the invisible enemy. This confuses the creature so much, it drops a boulder on its own head and dies.

Sue: Pass me the fucking whiskey, Neil.

Sue spends the next five minutes shaking her head and refilling her glass. And then Maya transforms into an eagle once again.

Sue: Anyone would think they'd hired an eagle for the day.

Maya is trapped in a basket made from chicken wire.

Sue: Just turn yourself into an insect, you idiot. She could easily get out of that, Neil!

Koenig picks up a wooden club and staggers towards the last remaining monster.

Sue: So the trees want these two to fight to the death using their dead friends as weapons? They haven't thought this through, have they?

We try to imagine what crime this monster must have committed to wind up here, and we conclude that he probably took a shit in the forest and wiped his arse on some shrubbery.

Sue: And what crime did I commit to end up watching this rubbish? Tell me that!

The monster and Koenig are allowed to communicate with each other during their hour of combat.

Sue: They're making it up as they go along!

Koenig throws a dead tree at the monster. It misses.

Sue: He dragged that log all the way down that hill, and that's the best he could do? Pathetic!

Koenig kills the monster with a home-made bola, and then he rescues Maya before her superpower can wear off.

Sue: That was a lucky escape. That chicken wire could have scratched her elbow, and that's quite nasty if you haven't had a tetanus jab.

The trees are very angry (or maybe it's just a stiff breeze) but – shock twist! – the plants decide to overthrow their deciduous overlords.

Sue: So the plants *want* to be eaten?

Me: They're tomato plants, Sue. What else are they going to do besides turn up in a salad? Write poetry?

Tony is also in for a shock when Luton suddenly reappears out of nowhere.

Sue: Eh? What? How? Oh, forget it. I don't fucking care!

Moonbase asks Koenig for his co-ordinates, but there's no need – Tony's already found them.

Sue: How the hell did he do that? It's a fucking planet!

Me: This must be Luton airport.

When they return to Moonbase Alpha, Tony gives Maya an exotic plant as a gift. The idiot.

Me: That plant kills everybody next week.

Sue: He should have given her a razor.

THE SCORE

Sue: Fucking hell. That's the worst thing you've ever made me watch. Nothing else even comes close. What's the worst score I've ever given something?

Me: You gave Slyvester McCoy's first *Doctor Who* story minus-one out of 10.

Sue: Well, in that case:

-2/10

Me: We should watch an episode from the first season. Some of them are...

Sue: Too late! I'll never watch *Space 1999* again. You've killed it. Next!

LOST IN SPACE

Requested by: Robbie Moubert

Please note: *the episodes in this book are presented in the order they were first broadcast, except for this one. Unfortunately, Gary was too busy to join us last week (how could I possibly not invite him?) so I'm putting it here instead, after Space 1999, which Sue had to endure first.*

Gary: I loved *Lost in Space* when I was growing up.

Me: When did you last see an episode?

Gary: I dunno. Forty years ago?

Sue: We aren't like you, Neil. We don't watch things over and over again until the joy has been sucked out of it. We both have lives, you know.

Even so, Gary can still remember the first episode like it was yesterday, and he spends the next five minutes telling us everything we need to know about the Robinson family, the duplicitous Dr Smith, and basic premise of the show. He's genuinely excited, bless him.

Gary: I hope it's one of the early episodes. They were the best.

I press 'play'.

THE GREAT VEGETABLE REBELLION

Sue: The production values are very good. Much better than *Space 1999*, that's for sure.

Gary: It's in colour. I've never seen *Lost in Space* in colour before.

I pause the episode so Sue and Gary can reminisce about their old black-and-white Rediffusion television set (the one with the tuner nailed to an adjoining wall). It's riveting stuff, but June Lockheart's face is beginning to burn itself into the television we own now and we press on.

Gary: *(Pointing at Penny Robinson)* She was one of the von Trapp kids in *The Sound of Music*.

Me: Sod that. *(Pointing at Will Robinson)* That's Lennier from *Babylon 5*!

Gary: Who?

Sue: *(Pointing at Judy Robinson)* Wasn't she on *Bewitched*?

Gary and Me: No!

Dr Zachary Smith is up to no good, for a change.

Sue: Is he the bad guy, Gary?

Gary: Yes. And he's as camp as arseholes.

Sue: *(Trying to change the subject and failing miserably)* He looks like Liberace. And he's married. He's wearing a wedding ring.

Gary: He isn't married. Trust me.

Dr Smith wants to visit a planet that's rich in vegetation so he can – wait for it – gather some flowers for a robot's birthday party.

Gary: He definitely isn't in Kansas any more.

Dr Smith picks a flower and it screams at him. (In agony or ecstasy? – it's impossible to say.)

Sue: Hang on a minute. Have they landed on Luton?

Gary: Since when has Luton looked like a garden centre?

Sue: This is exactly the same plot as *Space 1999*. Only the production values are better.

Oh dear, I think Sue spoke too soon.

Sue: What the fuck?

Oh look, it's a giant talking carrot.

Sue: WHAT THE FUCK?

Gary: I definitely don't remember this...

We're so stunned by the giant talking carrot, we barely notice the title sequence.

Sue: The music is very catchy. I'll give it that. But seriously? A carrot?

And that's about as good as it gets for Lost in Space. Apologies in advance if you're a dyed-in-the-wool Lostinspaceian.

Sue: I'm sorry, Gary, but no matter how bad *Doctor Who* got, and sometimes it was fucking terrible, you never saw any talking carrots.

Me: Although it did come pretty close a couple of times.

Dr Smith runs away and bumps into a man with purple hair.

Sue: Is he supposed to be a beetroot? Because he isn't selling it to me.

Willoughby is actually half-man half-lettuce, because Tybo (the giant talking carrot) gets his kicks from turning people into vegetables. He's basically Josef Mengele meets Alan Titchmarsh.

Gary: He should turn Dr Smith into a cucumber. He'd probably enjoy that.

Back on Jupiter (the spaceship, not the planet), the Robinsons' robot finally makes an appearance.

Gary: It's Robby the Robot!

Me: No, it isn't.

Gary: Oh yes it is.

Me: It really isn't.

Gary: Is.

Fuck it. Life's too short.

Gary: I can't believe you didn't know that, Neil.

Dr Smith refuses to leave the planet because he's suddenly 'become one' with nature.

Sue: Are you sure he hasn't been smoking the plants?

The Robinson clan divert to the planet so they can search for Dr Smith. The sound of plant life being killed as our heroes hack away at the foliage with their machetes sounds like they've accidentally interrupted some frisky nudists hiding in the bushes. "It's as if the plants feel pain," says Penny as John chops down another flower and it orgasms loudly.

Sue: Stop fucking killing them, then!

At this point, Sue's brother begins to look ashamed.

Sue: I can't believe you actually watched this shit, Gary. This is much worse than *Doctor Who*! Did you make me watch this shit instead? You did, didn't you?

Will and Judy discover that their robot (whose name definitely isn't Robby) is covered in roots and vines because he stopped to take a well-deserved rest.

Sue: You don't need to rest! You're a fucking robot!

Will, Judy and the robot with no name set out to find Dr Smith (luckily for them, their ship is overflowing with spare machetes).

Sue: Put your fucking machetes away – there's a path, there! Look, the robot is rolling down it, you murdering idiots!

They eventually find Dr Smith hugging a tree. And no, that isn't a euphemism.

Sue: And I thought *Space 1999* was bad. *Space 1999* is *Babylon-fucking-5* compared to this!

Me: Come on, Gary, defend this. Tell me how *Lost in Space* is better than *The Krotons*. Go on.

Gary: The What-ons?

Sue: Even *The Toymaker* (sic) is better than this rubbish!

Tybo locks John, Maureen, Penny and Don in a greenhouse, and when John dicks around with its thermostat, he accidentally makes it snow.

Sue: That isn't snow. That's Grade-A Columbian cocaine. It's the only explanation I can come up with for this nonsense.

I let Sue and Gary into a little secret: two cast members were suspended for laughing too much on the set during the filming of this scene. The studio would have reprimanded all three of them, but someone had to fly the spaceship in the next episode.

Sue: You can hardly blame them. It's as if they've accidentally filmed the Christmas party.

OH NO!! Penny has turned into a... hippy.

Sue: She looks lovely with flowers in her hair. Why are they so upset? It's not as if she's been transformed into a radish or something.

Gary: (*Singing*) She is 16 going on 17...

Me: ARGH! The pain! The pain!

Will and Penny are attacked by an angry nettle.

Me: Stranger danger, Will Robinson!

Meanwhile, John wonders if it's possible that the manual shut-off

switch that he's found beneath the greenhouse will shut everything off.

Sue: ARGH! JUST DO IT!

And then the giant talking carrot takes some time out from his busy schedule to water himself. It's almost erotic.

Gary: I can't believe I missed an hour on *Grindr* for this.

John finally decides to activate the manual shut-off switch. I mean, why the fuck not, eh?

Sue: HE SHOULD HAVE DONE THAT 10 MINUTES AGO!

Meanwhile, Dr Smith has been transformed into a giant stick of celery, and Will Robinson brings the house down when he tells Willoughby to stop nibbling on his friend. We're laughing too much to say anything even remotely coherent for the next five minutes. I could have paused the episode, but that would have been crazy.

Anyway, young Will is convinced that Dr Smith is acting exactly like a real stick of celery would.

Sue: How many sticks of celery have you talked to recently? Eh?

And then Dr Smith breaks into song, probably because this isn't weird enough already. Its lyrics include the line: "Doctor Smith with his coat so gay" which must be the understatement of the century.

Gary: What is this carrot hoping to achieve, exactly?

Sue: He wants to make a salad.

Me: You should see the body parts he uses for the hard boiled eggs.

Will Robinson threatens the malevolent vegetable with a machete.

Sue: What are you waiting for, lad? Turn him into crudité!

Tybo is finally defeated when his water supply runs out. Dr Smith runs off into the undergrowth demanding "Moisture! I must have moisture!"

Sue: Russell T Davies has definitely seen this. More than once, I bet.

Dr Smith returns to his usual cantankerous self, and the purple-haired lettuce-man promises to nurse Tybo back to health, which presumably means he'll be terrorising hapless visitors again in no time at all. Cue credits.

Sue: What the fuck?

THE SCORE

Gary: *Lost in Space* was really good when it first started. And then it went a bit stupid. That was one of the stupid ones.

Me: No shit, Sherlock.

Sue: Neil won't show us any good episodes, Gary. He always shows you the worst one he can find. He's a...

Me: I didn't choose this episode! This isn't my fault! Do you honestly think I enjoyed that?

Gary leaves the room before I can extract a score from him, but Sue doesn't hesitate:

-10/10

That isn't a typo, by the way. That's minus 10 out of 10. Oh dear. Still, it could have been worse. It could have been the Matt LeBlanc movie.

CHILDREN OF THE STONES

Requested by: Joe McIntyre

Sue: *Children of the Stones.* Why does that ring a bell?

The haunting theme music brings the memories flooding back. For both of us.

Sue: Oh, this is very familiar. I've definitely seen this before. I can't remember a thing about it, though. It looks scary.

Me: Scary? It's fucking terrifying!

Sue: That explains why I don't remember it. I never watched anything scary. This title sequence would have put me off.

Me: You were 15 when this was shown.

Sue: I don't care. It's still scaring me now.

An astrophysicist called Adam Brake is travelling to the village of Milbury with his son, Matthew.

Sue: It's Blake!

Me: Brake, actually.

Sue: You know what I mean. I miss Blake. Not as much as I miss Avon, but still.

As they approach their final destination, Brake has to slam on the brakes.

Sue: It's a Weeping Angel!

It's actually their new housekeeper, Mrs Crabtree.

Sue: What the hell was she doing in the middle of the road like that? Was that a suicide attempt?

After recovering from this shocking near-miss, Adam and Matthew are introduced to their new home.

Sue: There's wood everywhere: the beams, the furniture, even Blake's little boxes are made from wood. This is lovely.

As Adam and Matthew settle in, a mysterious girl appears outside their window.

Sue: The music is freaking me out. I hate scary things like this. You

know that, Neil.

When Mrs Crabtree is shown a painting which depicts an ancient ritual that took place in an ancient stone circle, she has a panic attacks and faints. In fact, she only truly recovers when the village leader, Mr Hendrick, makes an unexpected appearance.

Sue: Oh, it's him! What have I seen him in before?

Me: *(In my best Scottish accent)* "They're naked and they move!"

Sue: Oh yes, *Budgie*. He's brilliant. This is a great cast. I think I'm going to enjoy this.

Adam asks Mrs Crabtree to make a pot of tea for their guest.

Sue: She just fainted, and now you expect her to wait on you? That's marvellous, that is.

Matthew translates the Latin inscription on the painting: "I deny the existence of that which exists."

Sue: That's very deep. What time this go out?

Me: What time do you think it went out?

Sue: 9pm?

Me: Try 5pm. This is children's television.

Sue: No way!

Matthew is told to explore the village and he befriends a boy who offers to show him the sights. As the pair peddle away on their bikes, a strange man spies on them through his telescope.

Sue: Is that the village paedo? Every village had a paedo in the 1970s; I think it was compulsory. Actually, this reminds me of a Public Information Film. Any minute now, his friend will be run-over by a lorry, and then they'll be a lecture about helmets, or mirrors, or litter. Something like that.

Me: With a Donald Pleasance voiceover and a cameo by the Grim Reaper?

Sue: Exactly.

Suddenly, a lorry that's bearing down on Matthew's new friend miraculously disappears.

Sue: Did he have a premonition? Is he psychic?

Me: No, he's a cyclist.

I got a cushion in the face for that.

Sue: Did you see that coming?

When Matthew visits a local shop for local people, it becomes abundantly clear that something isn't quite right in this village.

Sue: This is basically *The Wicker Man*, isn't it? It's *The Wicker Man* for kids.

Hendrick and Adam retire to the pub.

Me: I've noticed that a lot of 1970s children's television takes place in pubs. First *The Tomorrow People*, and now this.

Sue: You'd never see anything like this today.

Me: Do they still make children's television today? We were spoilt back then with programmes like this.

Sue: I can't get over how good the cast is. They could have put this on in a prime-time slot, easily.

Hendrick introduces Adam to the local museum's curator, Margaret Smythe. And then he proposes a very creepy toast – "To old times and new!" – which sends a shiver down Sue's spine.

Sue: No, this guy isn't suspicious at all.

Matthew's first day at school gets off to a bad start when he attracts the attention of a bully named Kevin, although the little bastard says he only picked on him to see if Matthew was human or not.

Sue: Right. I've got it. It's *The Wicker Man* for kids meets *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. It was a UFO in that painting – the village has been taken over by aliens. There, I've worked it out.

The children in the school are divided between those who enjoy solving complicated equations, and those who'd rather make inappropriate jokes about sexual intercourse.

Sue: They have definitely been taken over by aliens. The clever ones are basically the Stepford Kids.

Adam visits Millbury's museum so he can flirt with Margaret again.

Sue: These two will shag sooner or later. It's just a matter of time. I'm intrigued by this. Yes, I think I'm hooked already.

A fight breaks out between Kevin and one of the 'happy' kids.

Sue: Bloody hell! That punch was very realistic. Are you sure this is for children, Neil?

And then Margaret asks Adam to touch one of her stones.

Sue: For a second there, I thought she was going to ask him to touch one of her nipples.

Me: It's 5pm, Sue.

Sue: I know!

Meanwhile, Matthew remains the object of a strange man's gaze.

Sue: He's fresh meat for the village paedo. God, you wouldn't even hint at something like that today.

The man in question is played by Freddie Jones.

Sue: Yes, I've definitely seen him in something else. I think he was playing a paedo in that as well.

When Adam touches one of the village stones, he is suddenly overwhelmed by strange visions before tumbling helplessly to the ground.

Sue: She's disappointed. She thought he was a lot harder than that.

And then the eeriest theme music ever composed for a children's television series (no mean feat) signals the end of the first episode.

THE SCORE

Sue: That was great. A bit too scary for my liking, but I can't wait to see what happens next.

Me: What are you going to give it out of 10?

Sue: What about the rest?

Me: We're only watching the first episode.

Sue: Eh? What?

Me: It's seven parts. We haven't got enough time to watch them all. The ebook is a year late already.

Sue: But I was just getting into it.

Me: You actually want to see the rest, don't you?

Sue: Yes, I do. It would be stupid not to. Those *Quatermass* episodes are missing, but there's no excuse for not finishing this.

Me: Tell you what, we'll watch the whole thing when this book is finished and we'll blog it early next year. How does that sound?

Sue: Right. Good. I'll give it a score when I've seen it all.

Me: Couldn't you at least score the first episode?

Sue: Don't push it, Neil.

THE BIONIC WOMAN

Requested by: Chaz Antonelli

Me: Did you watch *The Bionic Woman* back in the day, Sue?

Sue: No.

Me: What about *The Six Million Dollar Man*?

Sue: Not really. What about you? I've never heard you bump your gums about it.

Me: I loved the Bionic Man, but I wasn't a fan of *The Bionic Woman*.

Sue: Why not? Was it shit?

Me: No, it was because she was a woman.

Sue: Neil!

Me: I always hoped the Bionic Man would turn up to help her out, but he hardly ever did.

Sue: You sexist pig!

Me: I was seven!

Sue: That is so sad. What a dreadful thing to say.

Me: I don't feel the same way about it today, of course.

Sue: Good.

Me: These days, I think they're both shit.

DOOMSDAY IS TOMORROW (PART 1)

Sue: I don't like the theme music. It sounds like a soap opera, or something cheesy like that. And wasn't she in *Charlie's Angels*? I definitely watched that.

Me: No.

The action begins in an underground base, which Sue immediately falls in love with.

Sue: It's fucking massive!

Although she loves Jaime Sommers' kitchen even more.

Sue: I'm really jealous of her wooden worktop. And that table is beautiful. I hope the rest of this story takes place in her kitchen. It's fabulous.

Jaime is trying (and failing) to follow a recipe on a cookery programme.

Me: Steve Austin is off fighting the Russians while Jaime uses her superpowers to peel some vegetables. And that, in a nutshell, is why I didn't watch *The Bionic Woman*.

Sue: Did they ever get it together? The Bionic Man and the Bionic Woman?

Me: I can't remember.

Sue: They must have done. I bet their other partners couldn't keep up with them in the bedroom.

Dr Elijah Cooper interrupts the cooking programme with an important message for humanity: stop testing nuclear weapons or face the consequences. Oscar Goldman isn't pleased, to put it mildly.

Me: I used to have an Oscar Goldman doll.

Sue: Okay...

Me: He had a briefcase and everything. I also had Steve Austin's Bionic Transport and Repair System (which was basically a bed in a rocket). Oh, and I had his archenemy, Maskatron, too. You could make him look like Oscar Goldman.

Sue: So you had two Oscar Goldmans, but you didn't have a Bionic Woman doll?

Me: God, no! That would be like asking your mum for a Sindy. My sister would have crucified me. Besides, if I needed a cameo from Jaime, I'd just borrow one of my sister's dolls without telling her. Sorry, Joanne, if you're reading this (which you aren't).

Sue: You should apologise to a lot more people than that.

Elijah has invented a Doomsday device.

Sue: He's a Bond villain in a cardigan. And a badly-fitting cardigan at that!

Elijah invites four scientists to his secret base so they can verify his claims, and Jaime is tasked with infiltrating the group by posing as a French physicist.

Sue: So she's pretending to be a world famous scientist who's never been photographed. It's a good job Wikipedia wasn't around in the 1970s, that's all I'm saying.

Oscar warns Jaime that her mission is exceedingly dangerous.

Sue: He's an old man in a cardigan! I'm sure she could take him out even if she wasn't bionic.

Jaime and Rudy Wells (who reminds Sue of a young Ron Swanson from Parks and Rec) are the first to arrive at Elijah's secret base.

Sue: They shouldn't have turned up early if they wanted to fudge

this. They're asking for trouble.

Jaime's super-hearing is extremely helpful when it comes to bluffing her way through an awkward introduction with Elijah, but when she encounters a scientist from Russia, he suddenly claims that they've met before.

Sue: *(In a bad Russian accent)* You're looking well. The last time we met you were 65.

Me: *(In an even worse Russian accent)* And black.

Elijah tells the scientists that he wants to blackmail the world.

Sue: He's too old to need the money, so he must be after world peace, or something stupid like that.

She's right, of course.

Sue: Who does he think he is? The KLF?

Elijah is a clever bastard, that's for sure.

Sue: How did he manage all this on his own? No wonder he looks tired. And who's paying him? Surely he can't afford to run this place if he has to walk around in that shitty cardigan.

Elijah berates the world for creating weapons of mass destruction.

Sue: That's a bit rich coming from the guy who just built a fucking Doomsday machine!

Elijah flicks several switches on a console, which primes the Doomsday device. Now, if a nuclear weapon is detonated again, the thing will activate and life as we know it will cease to exist.

Sue: I don't suppose flicking those switches back the other way would stop it, would it? They could at least try. I know I would.

Elijah has also created an artificial intelligence called, wait for it... ALEX 7000.

Me: But you can call him AL.

Sue: It is quite similar to 2001.

Me: *Quite!?* It's the most blatant rip-off of a science fiction concept I've ever seen! And I've seen *Wayward Pines*! I'm surprised Stanley

Kubrick didn't sue. They're not even trying to hide it; it looks and sounds exactly the same.

An unnamed county in the Middle East sticks two fingers up at Elijah's demands when it refuses to cancel a nuclear bomb test (it's obviously Israel, but nobody wants to say it). Anyway, Oscar orders Jaime back to Elijah's base to sort this mess out, but only because Steve Austin is too busy mucking about on Skylab to lend a bionic hand.

Me: I would have changed channels at that point.

Sue: You sexist bastard.

Jaime runs back to Elijah's secret base as fast as she can.

Sue: Who decided the best way to show something moving really fast was to slow it down?

Me: I know! It's crazy, but somehow it works.

Sue: Does it? The problem with slowing everything down like that is you can tell when she suddenly turns into a stuntman. And it is a man.

Me: But if you sped her up, she'd look like Benny Hill.

Jaime joins forces with a Russian spy named Dmitri (who, just like her, was posing as a scientist).

Sue: I like the way she keeps showing him up. I want more scenes of her humiliating the Russian 007. This is great!

Dmitri is gobsmacked when he realises that Jaime is a cyborg. Back in Russia, they've only managed to modify small animals.

Sue: Their bionic mice are fucking useless, it has to be said.

Jaime is taking a big risk allowing the Ruskie to discover her secrets like this.

Sue: Don't worry, she can kill him later.

Unfortunately, Dmitri is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, which makes him the perfect candidate to send into a minefield.

Sue: Stupid Russians.

Jaime reaches the base (no thanks to Dmitri) but Elijah is already

knocking on death's door.

Sue: You wouldn't see Jack Bauer holding the old man's hand like that. He'd be too busy sticking a screwdriver in his crotch as demands the access codes.

The unnamed nuclear superpower in the Middle East stubbornly goes ahead with its nuclear bomb test, which activates the Doomsday device. It will explode in less than six hours, which means the only thing standing between Jaime and Armageddon is AL 7000.

Me: They may as well play some fucking Strauss and be done with it!

And that's when the words 'To Be Continued' appear.

Sue: Oh, for fuck's sake! I thought there were only two minutes left and she was going to kick the shit out of the computer. The end.

DOOMSDAY IS TOMORROW (PART 2)

Sue takes another look at The Bionic Woman's title sequence.

Sue: So she's a tennis pro? She wasn't a spy before they fiddled with her?

Me: I think so.

Sue: You'd think they'd spend all that money on someone who knew what they were doing. That's a bit silly. But not as silly as this theme tune. It's crap!

Elijah broadcasts a recorded message from beyond the grave, in which he sincerely hopes that humanity will learn from its mistakes as it awaits imminent destruction.

Sue: What about all the innocent children you're about to kill, you dick!

Jaime will have to reach a secret vault that's hidden beneath the base if she wants to deactivate the Doomsday device.

Me: Just open the fucking door, AL.

Jaime heads outside to find another way in.

Me: I love the funky incidental music. I keep expecting Dirty Harry to turn up.

Sue: The relationship between ALEX and Jaime is quite funny. He's such a patronising git.

Me: I think he fancies her. Well, bits of her.

Meanwhile, Rudy Wells has come up with a crazy idea to neutralise the Doomsday device: drop a nuclear bomb on it.

Sue: I'm no scientist, but I'm pretty sure that radiation doesn't cancel itself out like that. Does it?

Even Rudy isn't convinced that it will work.

Sue: Wind your neck back in, then!

Jaime enters Elijah's base via an access tunnel, so ALEX fills it with foam.

Me: We're watching somebody called Jaime faffing about a corridor filled with foam. It's just like old times, this.

Sue: Except this Jaime isn't wearing a skirt.

Jaime hurls herself through a closing door, but it traps her bionic leg. Jaime is devastated.

Sue: They were her favourite trousers.

Jaime begins to fall apart emotionally, as well as physically.

Sue: Did Steve Austin ever cry like this? I bet he fucking didn't.

Me: Actually, he was so depressed about his bionic legs, he tried to kill himself.

Sue: Really? Can we watch that instead? That sounds amazing.

Elijah broadcasts another message to the world. FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE!

Sue: Stop rubbing it in!

He hopes the leaders of the world will spend their last hours on Earth meditating on their own stupidity.

Sue: As if. You know they're going to shag like there's no tomorrow.

Elijah signs off.

Sue: Don't worry, he'll be back in an hour to gloat some more.

Jaime repairs her damaged leg and ALEX tries to drop a huge weight on her head.

Sue: It's like one of those fairground games where you have to grab a teddy bear, only in reverse. It's very tense, this. And the direction is excellent. It's shot like a feature film.

Jaime lets it slip that she's terrified of snakes, so ALEX convinces her that the basement is literally crawling with them.

Sue: So what? If a snake bit her on her leg, it would get an electric shock. Pull yourself together, woman!

The vault is located beneath a huge power complex.

Sue: This location is amazing. I've seen smaller Bond sets.

Me: I keep expecting the cast of *Blake's 7* to come running the other way.

Meanwhile, the Israeli scientist who caused this catastrophe by setting off a nuclear bomb in the first place, decides to spend some quality time with his daughter before the world ends.

Sue: That was very profound. Shame about all the other kids he's killed because he's an arrogant dick.

Jaime reaches ALEX's memory circuits. She wonders what will happen if she starts meddling with them.

Me: He'll sing 'Daisy, Daisy', obviously.

Sue: It's very similar. But I didn't want HAL to die; I felt sorry for HAL. This computer, on the other hand, can go fuck itself. Pull 'em out, pet!

But Elijah was bluffing the whole time. There is no Doomsday device. Just a room with a quote from the Bible, which basically tells everybody to be nice to each other, for fuck's sake.

Sue: How was anyone supposed to read that stupid message when he programmed a homicidal computer to stop them? Eh?

But wait! A B-52 bomber, armed with Rudy's stupid nuclear weapon, is still heading for the base. And Oscar can't recall it!

Me: And now they're copying *Dr Strangelove*. This had better not turn into *Lolita*.

Jaime saves the day by activating the base's sprinkler system, which causes ALEX 7000 to short circuit.

Sue: I don't have any nails left. That was brilliant.

THE SCORE

Sue: I didn't think I'd enjoy that half as much as I did. It was very tense. The direction was amazing, and the idea was very clever, too, especially for its time. It was too long, though; I would have scored it even higher if they'd crammed it into an hour. And you definitely missed out when you decided not to watch *The Bionic Woman*, Neil. Which serves you fucking right.

8/10

SECRET ARMY

Requested by: Simon Harries

Sue doesn't remember watching Secret Army in the 1970s. And neither do I.

Sue: I remember *Colditz*, if that helps.

Me: Well, they both feature Nazis, I suppose.

Sue: I can't believe we're actually doing this. So what are we watching after it? *The World At War*?

LOST SHEEP

Me: Listen carefully, I shall once say this only once: Don't mention 'Allo 'Allo!

This is, of course, impossible.

Sue: I'll be able to look at some French property while this is on, so there's that, at least.

According to the gloomy title sequence, this episode's guest star is none other than Peter Barkworth.

Me: Ah, I remember why Simon chose this episode, now. It's because you loved Peter Barkworth when he was in *Doctor Who*.

Sue: Did I? I can't remember...

The episode begins with an exceptionally angry Christopher Neame.

Sue: Is that Peter Barkworth? Because he was definitely in *Doctor Who*.

Me: No.

Sue: Didn't he father the blonde one from *Peep Show*?

Me: You always say that about Christopher Neame.

Sue: Only because it's true! Anyway, I definitely remember this now. They hide British airmen above the cafe until they can escape back to England.

Me: That's right.

Sue: And there's a painting of a woman with really big tits...

Me: Stop it!

The biggest stumbling block we have to overcome while watching Secret Army is its attitude to accents. And I'm not talking about someone 'pissing by', either.

Sue: There are a lot of British people in this cafe. It can't be very safe.

Me: They aren't British; they're French.

Sue: EH?

It is a bit weird. You see, the British characters speak with British accents, but so do the French. Well, some of the French characters sound British; some of them sound French because a) they're actually French or b) they're brave enough to attempt a French accent. And yet all the Germans sound German. Like I said, it's odd.

Sue: It's as if the director said to the cast, "Do what you want." There's no consistency to it. And does that mean this guy is French?

Me: No, Christopher Neame is in the RAF. His job is to help British soldiers who have been shot down over France.

Sue: I know what would help me: if all the French characters wore berets.

Me: I can't believe you just said that.

Sue: I'm joking, obviously. They could wrap onions around their necks, as well.

Christopher Neame befriends a British airman named Peter Romsey, who, after a couple of drinks, is more than happy to spill the beans about the RAF's brand-new targeting system.

Sue: What a fucking idiot. I'm surprised he didn't offer to draw him a fucking diagram!

Romsey is bollocked for being too trusting and then he's hidden in the attic with two more airmen who are also waiting to escape.

Sue: He's got verbal diarrhoea. I bet he gets them all killed.

We're only 10 minutes into this and Sue is already biting her nails.

Sue: You can't say anything funny about this. It's too good.

Me: That didn't stop David Croft and Jeremy Lloyd. 'Allo 'Allo! lasted twice as long as the actual war.

Sue: Thank you, Simon, for nominating this for me to watch. This is going to be a nightmare.

Me: Perhaps he took pity on you after everything I've put you through. Maybe he wants you to see something good for a change.

Sue: I think we should stop this right now and offer him a refund.

Me: We can't. I already spent the money.

Sue: On what?

Me: On a *Secret Army* DVD box set. It wasn't cheap, you know.

The Resistance escort Romsey and his fellow escapees to a train station, but Romsey gets on the wrong train.

Sue: I thought he was supposed to be a navigator? I bet he couldn't find his own arse without a map.

Realising his mistake, Romsey gets off at the next stop so he can catch a train back to Paris.

Sue: Billet means ticket in French, Neil.

Me: Thanks for that, Sue.

Romsey takes a stroll and stumbles upon a man fishing on a riverbank.

Sue: Finally! A man wearing a beret!

The fisherman is from Paris.

Sue: Via Surrey by the sound of it.

Romsey tells the fisherman that he's a RAF navigator on the run.

Sue: I almost want him to get caught, he's so stupid. Doesn't he know there's a war on?

Romsey wanders off before the fisherman can bring the police down on him, and he ends up being helped by a gamekeeper who directs him to a British author living nearby.

Cue Peter Barkworth as Hugh Neville.

Sue: Ah, yes. I do remember him. He's brilliant.

Romsey can't wait to spill the beans, and when Hugh starts pressing him on the Resistance, Sue becomes very suspicious indeed.

Sue: He's going to turn you in, you idiot!

Hugh's wife seems to be entranced by Romsey.

Sue: Is she French?

Me: I have no fucking idea.

Sue: I think they're trying to get him drunk.

Me: I think they're going to pump him for information.

Sue: Or they're swingers and they're trying to get him into bed. Whatever it is they're doing, they're making me nervous.

Hugh isn't a big fan of the British, despite being British himself.

Me: He may as well be wearing a t-shirt with 'I Am A Collaborator' written on it.

Sue: He's amazing. I can't take my eyes off him. He would have been a brilliant Doctor Who.

When the police start making enquiries about a missing British airman, Hugh's wife freaks out.

Sue: Hang on. Maybe these two are okay, after all. The story is keeping me guessing, I'll give it that.

Hugh takes a walk into town where he encounters his friend, police inspector Dubois.

Sue: He's going to give him away. It's so obvious. His wife will go ballistic when she finds out.

Dubois warns Hugh that his home will be searched later that night.

Sue: Look at the way Peter Barkworth's hand is shaking in this scene. He's incredible. I could watch him all day.

That night, as the police search Hugh's house, Dubois delicately dances around the fact that he knows full well that his friend is almost certainly hiding a British airman.

Sue: This is basically *Inglourious Basterds*, isn't it? I can't bear to watch this. It's too tense!

The inspector reminds Hugh that if he's caught harbouring a wanted fugitive, he'll be shot as a traitor and his wife will end up in a concentration camp.

Sue: I don't remember any running gags about concentration camps in *'Allo 'Allo!* Actually, I wasn't a big fan of *'Allo 'Allo!* to start with, but this programme has really turned me against it.

And then we both stop talking for absolutely ages. We just can't help it; Secret Army is that gripping. Anyway, to cut a long story short, the Resistance have sent an odd-job man named Victor to Hugh's house so he can smuggle Romsey away in a wooden box

that's been attached to his motorcycle's sidecar.

Sue: I bet he won't stop talking, even when they seal the lid.

As Victor and Romsey make their break for freedom, Hugh glances at his telephone.

Sue: I almost don't blame him. I mean, you just know that Romsey will tell the Germans everything they want as soon as he's caught. And you know they'll catch him because he's hopeless. And then Peter Barkworth will be shot and his wife will end up in Auschwitz. Yeah, I'd probably make the same phone call. Isn't that terrible?

The Germans are waiting for Victor and his precious cargo as he tries to flee the area. Victor is shot in the back and his motorcycle crashes into a ditch.

Sue: SHIT!

Major Brandt takes Romsey back to German HQ on a train.

Me: *(Pointing at Michael Culver)* He was in *The Empire Strikes Back*.

Sue: Oh really? What part did he play?

Me: A Nazi.

Sue: Does Darth Vader strangle him because he's shit at his job?

Me: Yeah.

Sue: What a surprise.

Brandt uses the journey as an opportunity to gather as much intelligence from Romsey as possible.

Me: Like that's going to be difficult. A glass of absinthe should do the trick.

Sue: I know I should feel sorry for him, but come on! Loads of people will die now because he won't be able to keep his mouth shut. And I feel terrible saying this, but I don't blame Peter Barkworth, either. I definitely wouldn't have risked your life for his, love.

Me: Thanks... I think.

THE SCORE

Sue: That was ridiculously good. Everything about it – the acting, the direction, the script, the location – was perfect. I don't know what else to say.

Sue: Not only was that the best thing we've watched for that book you keep telling me we've almost finished, it's the best thing I've seen on TV for *ages*. Please thank Simon for me.

Me: That *Secret Army* DVD box set doesn't seem so silly now, does it?

Sue: No, it doesn't. Let's watch the next one.

WORZEL GUMMIDGE

Requested by: Bradley Forssman

Sue: *Worzel-fucking-Gummidge?* For fuck's sake, Neil. What's next? *Bagpuss?*

Me: I always feel uncomfortable when I watch *Worzel Gummidge*.

Sue: Does it remind you of your unhappy childhood?

Me: No, it reminds me that I used to be a massive twat.

Sue: Used to be?

Once upon a time, I betrayed a Worzel Gummidge fan.

It was the late-1990s and I was into Babylon 5. And because I couldn't wait for the episodes to show up on Channel 4, or for Bit Torrent to be invented, I had no choice but to befriend an American Worzel Gummidge fan on the internet in order to get my fix.

Actually, he was interested in the spin-off series, Worzel Gummidge Down Under, but that isn't important. What is important is that episodes of Worzel Gummidge were extremely hard to come by if you happened to live in Florida in 1998.

Anyway, as luck would have it, the episodes he so badly needed were about to be broadcast on UK Gold every Sunday at 9am. So we formed a symbiotic relationship and both of us were very happy.

The only problem was I didn't trust the timer on the NTSC VCR I'd imported to play my Babylon 5 episodes on, which meant I had to wake up ridiculously early every Sunday morning and record the programme manually. And on those very rare occasions where I actually managed to stay awake, I edited out the adverts for him too.

And then Babylon 5 finished. But that was okay because there was only one episode of Worzel Gummidge Down Under left to record – the season finale! – and then my American friend would have the complete set.

However, that particular Sunday morning I was hungover (I was drinking to forget the last episode of Babylon 5), so when my alarm went off, I muttered a half-remembered, "Fuck it" and went back to sleep.

Sue: I don't know how you can live with yourself!

Me: When I told you about this at the time, you thought it was hilarious.

Sue: Has he got the episodes now?

Me: I expect so. They're probably on *YouTube*. But that isn't the point. I still feel terrible about it. Especially when, 10 years later, I almost bumped into him at a *Doctor Who* convention in Los Angeles. And by that I mean I spotted him in a crowd and ran in the opposite direction. I'm a such coward. Anyway, I'm not the one on trial today.

I press 'play'.

THE TRIAL OF WORZEL GUMMIDGE

Me: So, what do you know about *Worzel Gummidge*, Sue?

Sue: It was shown on Sunday afternoons, and my younger brother, Kenny, was terrified of it. Me and Gary used to make fun of him because he'd hide behind the sofa when it was on. It didn't help that our mam looked a bit like *Worzel Gummidge* when she was drunk, mind.

Worzel winks at the audience.

Me: Yeah, that is pretty scary, I suppose.

Sue: I felt sorry for him. *Worzel*, I mean. Not our Kenny. He's got a shit job, freezing his balls off in a field like that. Who'd want a job like that?

If that wasn't bad enough, Worzel is perpetually at war with the crows.

Sue: Is that Jon Pertwee's real voice?

Me: No, he didn't speak like that all the time.

Sue: No, silly. I mean is doing that voice himself, or is it done later in post-production?

Me: No, Jon's doing it all himself.

Sue: There was a canister of helium, just off-camera?

Me: No.

Sue: Wow. He's even more talented than I thought.

Worzel use a giant slingshot to launch potatoes at the crows.

Sue: He's basically invented *Angry Birds* 30 years too early.

While Worzel gets up to mischief, a man dressed in black looks on in despair.

Sue: Is that the Crowmaster?

Me: Close enough.

Sue: He looks like the child catcher from *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*.

The Crowman takes Worzel to a cow shed. Worzel's friends, Sue and John, decide to investigate.

Me: Do you recognise her?

Sue: No. Should I?

I tell her that her namesake is played by Charlotte Coleman; she

remembers her from Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit.

Me: She died from an asthma attack at a ridiculously young age.

Sue: Well, that was cheerful. Thanks for that, Neil. I'll think about that during the funny bits.

The Crowman has summoned the local scarecrows to a secret meeting.

Sue: They're fucking zombies. Look at them! It's *Dawn of the Living Scarecrows*! Now I know why Kenny used to shit himself.

As the scarecrows lumber eerily across the countryside, Aunt Sally arrives at the shed on the back of a cart.

Sue: Aunt Sally used to scare Kenny the most. Gary would sneak up behind him and scream, "Aunt Sally's going to get you! Aunt Sally's going to get you!" He was traumatised, poor kid.

Me: So why are you laughing?

As soon as his peers finish assembling in the shed, Worzel is accused of crimes against scarecrowing.

Sue: The crows must be having a field day while this is going on.

Sergeant Beetroot brings order to the court.

Sue: This is the second time you've made me watch a man pretend to be a beetroot.

Me: He was a lettuce.

Sue: Whatever. Either way, there are a lot of vegetables in our next book.

Me: Do you recognise the actor who's playing the beetroot?

Sue: It's not Arthur Mullard, is it?

Me: God no! It's Bill Maynard. You know. Selwyn Froggitt.

Sue: Sorry, you've lost me now.

She doesn't even recognise Catweazle.

Sue: He reminds me of William Hartnell. If William Hartnell let himself go or fell into a haystack, that is.

Me: Geoffrey Bayldon was offered the role of the Doctor, but he turned it down. More than once, I believe.

Sue: Good! He's bloody terrifying!

Aunt Sally takes to the stand.

Sue: Didn't you tell me once that Una Stubbs...

Me: Ssh... You're missing the best bit. Aunt Sally has just admitted that she's shagged a beetroot.

Sue: Wow. That's even worse!

And then Sue asks a very important question:

Sue: Why are they alive?

Me: Fuck knows.

Sue: Well, there must be a good reason. What would be the point, otherwise? Why would you bring something to life that's going to be strapped to a pole in the ground? It's insane.

Aunt Sally testifies against Worzel.

Sue: Remind me why he fancies her again. Because she's fucking horrible!

Me: What do you think of Jon Pertwee's performance?

Sue: Oh, he's brilliant. This can't have been easy.

Me: Do you prefer Jon Pertwee as Worzel or the Doctor?

Sue: Oh Worzel, easy. He's more down to earth in this. And he looks like Rod Stewart, too.

Aunt Sally cross-examines herself.

Sue: That was excellent. The script is very funny. There are definitely plenty of jokes for the adults.

Worzel hopes to escape to Bulgaria.

Sue: Bulgaria? Whoever wrote this is a genius.

Worzel is found guilty, and Sue and John are forced to intervene.

Sue: The scarecrows will have to kill them now. They can't leave any witnesses.

Me: Is this the sort of thing you used to tell Kenny?

When it comes to defending poor Worzel, the children are literally lost for words.

Sue: This is very funny. I bet Nicol would have enjoyed this when she was six years old.

Me: She would have been too busy watching *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*.

Worzel's sentence (the compost heap) is suddenly rescinded when he admits he's been sheltering some baby birds in his chest cavity. Like that explains everything.

Sue: Wouldn't it be funny if they turned out to be crows and he had to kill them with a potato in the next episode?

Worzel returns to his field with a spring in his step.

Sue: I don't know why he's so happy. It's a shit job. And why is he alive in the first place? It's so cruel.

THE SCORE

Me: So what are you giving that?

Sue: I don't know. I definitely enjoyed it, although I'm sure I would have enjoyed it a lot more if I'd watched it with my imaginary grandchildren, instead of on a Friday night with my stupid husband, but you can't have everything.

Me: But apart from that you enjoyed it?

Sue: It was all right, I suppose. The script was quite funny. Bizarre, but funny. Jon Pertwee was surprisingly good. Oh, and it was definitely for kids, so:

7/10

Sue: So what's next, then? *The Magic Roundabout*?

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