

The Insider

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Your Connection to BBC Worldwide Americas

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What's All This Then?

Who? What? Where? When? Wow!

Welcome to the very first issue of **The Insider**. Four times a year we will make it our mission to bring you the latest news, reviews, and background information about programs and performers you already love and (sneaky devils that we are), perhaps introduce you to some new favorites as well.

Why are so many Americans in love with British television? Is it the accents? The seemingly exotic locales with lovely names that trip so nicely off the tongue?

Maybe, but more than that it's the **quality**. Britain is a nation with a strong literary and theatrical tradition that has spawned exactly what's needed for great viewing: writers with a true mastery of the English language as well as versatile, well-trained actors who don't necessarily view television work simply as a stepping stone to film stardom.

Our hope, then, is that you'll find this newsletter an informative and entertaining celebration of the best British television has to offer and that you'll come away from each issue feeling like a true "insider."

Please feel free to send comments, suggestions and article ideas for future issues. See the next page for contact details. We look forward to your feedback and until next time, enjoy this issue.

Michelle Street, Editor

It's In His Face

The Life and Times of Rowan Atkinson

"Peter Lorre in a panic"

-A critic describing Rowan Atkinson's face

One look at Rowan Atkinson and you realize he had no other choice **but** to go into comedy. Forget the degree he holds in Engineering Science from Oxford. Forget the fact that his family owned a 400-acre farm he could have very well inherited.

No, the man who grew up with nicknames such as Zoonie and Moonman was made for comedy. It's as if he were dreamt up by some cartoonist and sprung to life as a living, breathing caricature complete with exaggerated features and a body every bit as rubbery as that face.



"Perhaps you should call it that strange-bendy-thing-that-holds-his-head-on."

Former sidekick Angus Deayton on Rowan's body

His face and that bendy body have proven to be his fortune, but his mouth hasn't done too badly either. The impeccably timed sarcasm dripping from many of his characters would not have been nearly as effective coming from anyone else. Even *Blackadder* co-writer Ben Elton acknowledged this fact when he told a reporter that a character in a *BA* episode was specifically called "Bob" because they knew what Rowan could do with that name.

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The Insider Mailbox



I keep hearing rumors that there will be another series of *Blackadder*. Can you tell me if this is true?

Sandie Gibson, NJ

Rumors have been flying around for years about another series, but it looks unlikely. My personal favorite idea had the *Blackadder* crew coming back as a rock band featuring drummer Bald Rick. However, the cast did get together recently to make a short *Blackadder* film to be shown at London's Millennium Dome.

What's Hugh Laurie up to these days?

Gail Loschen, Illinois

Laurie will soon begin filming *Maybe, Baby*, a movie about a couple trying to begin a family. It's expected in theaters next summer and is being written and directed by *Blackadder* co-writer Ben Elton. Laurie is also reportedly working on his second novel.

Is there a good place on the Internet to buy British videos and goodies? Also, if I buy a video from a Web site in Britain, will I be able to play it on an American VCR?

Caroline Jessup, Oregon

Visit the PBS Web site (www.pbs.org) or the BBC Worldwide Americas Web site (www.bbc-worldwide-americas.com) for a wide selection. For more handy Web sites, see page 13 of this issue.

To answer your second question, you will not be able to view tapes made in Britain on your VCR unless you have a machine that is capable of playing both American (NTSC) and British (PAL) videos. These are more expensive than normal VCRs, but many fans find them well worth the cost.

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The Insider welcomes all correspondence. Send letters via e-mail to editor Michelle Street at bcdigest@soltec.com or by snail mail to: *The Insider*, c/o Julie Marshall, BBC Worldwide Americas, 747 3rd Avenue, New York, NY. Include your full name and location. All letters are assumed to be for publication unless marked otherwise. **The Insider** reserves the right to edit letters for reasons of space or clarity. Let us know what you think!

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In The News



Jonathan Creek star **Caroline Quentin** has announced that she is pregnant. The father of the child is Sam Farmer, a production runner she met while making her series *Men Behaving Badly*

Nicholas Lyndhurst of the popular sitcoms *Goodnight Sweetheart* and *Only Fools and Horses* is going to become a married man in September when he weds his girlfriend, Lucy Smith.

Monty Python alumnus **Eric Idle** has joined the cast of the Brooke Shields sitcom *Suddenly Susan*. He will replace the departing Judd Nelson as Shield's new boss. Plots will revolve around Idle's attempts to turn the magazine into a racy men's publication.

There is also rumor that Idle's former Python cohort **John Cleese** will star as George Washington in an upcoming biopic.

Absolutely Fabulous star **Joanna Lumley** is keeping very busy these days. She stars in this fall's new series *Dr. Willoughby*, playing a spoiled, temperamental actress in a medical soap opera. Also on her platter is *Dinks and Fizz*, which will reunite her with *AbFab* writer/star **Jennifer Saunders**. Saunders, fresh from filming a new period sitcom called *Let Them Eat Cake*, will be writing the series.

Che! star **Lenny Henry** is making the transition from comedy to drama in his new series *Hope and Glory*. Henry plays headteacher Ian George, who struggles to save a failing, substandard school.

Birdy Sweeney, better known to *Ballykissangel* fans as farmer Eamon Byrne, passed away recently at age 68. He had already filmed four episodes of the upcoming fifth series when he succumbed to a heart attack in Dublin. He leaves behind eight children and his wife Alice. (Read more about *BallyK* on page 5.)

Right before going to press, we also learned the sad news of the death of **Bill Owen**, the beloved star of *The Last of the Summer Wine*. He was 85 and had just completed filming the *Summer Wine* millennium special in France shortly before he passed away from cancer. He was laid to rest in the Yorkshire village of Holmfirth, the setting for *Last of the Summer Wine*.

The Insider Interview:

20 Questions with Red Dwarf's Robert Llewellyn

You probably wouldn't recognize him if you met him on the street, but Robert Llewellyn is beloved by legions of Red Dwarf fans as the mechanoid Kryten. That voice, that silly walk and those hissy fits when Lister begins paying too much attention to Kochanski have all helped make RD the success that it is.

However, as you'll discover in this exclusive Insider Interview, there's much more to Robert Llewellyn than meets the mask...

Did you train for any other profession or did you always want to be in showbiz?

Shoemaker, nude model and tree surgeon are the main ones. I also worked on various farms looking after and milking cattle

Did you have any comedy heroes who inspired you?

Fred Gwynne (Herman Munster), Steptoe and Son, Woody Allen

How did you come to be cast as Kryten? Did you have much of an influence on the development of the character?

I wrote and performed in a play "Mammon, Robot Born of Woman" in 1988 at the Edinburgh festival, seen in the play by the then producer of RED DWARF. Very little or no influence on the way the character develops, although I did co-write one episode with Doug Naylor, Beyond a Joke in series VII

You didn't begin work on Red Dwarf until Series 3. Did you have a tough time being accepted by the already established cast?

Not at all, I was accepted within minutes. They are a very friendly bunch.

You've said that there are certain aspects of your personality in the character of Kryten. Are there similarities between Craig, Danny, Chris and Chloe and their respective characters as well?

Yes, I think there probably are, only not quite to the same degree as the character. But Craig can eat shocking amounts of very hot curry.

You mention in your book "Man in the Rubber Mask" that it was a pretty excruciating and time-consuming process to become Kryten. Have the technical wizards made any advances since the beginning so that the suit and mask are more comfortable for you?

The mask is quicker to apply, got down from five hours to about two. The suit is more comfortable but very hot.

Even some high quality British comedies do not go over well in the States. Any idea why Red Dwarf has succeeded in America (and indeed many other parts of the world) where others have failed?

I guess because it isn't located in England, is sci-fi based and is very well written.

Given Red Dwarf's popularity in the States, has there been any pressure to make changes and tailor it more to American audiences?

Not that I am aware of.

You were involved in two pilots for an American version of Red Dwarf. Do you look back on these as a good experience? Any idea why they ultimately didn't get picked up?

I had a great time making them and got on with the US cast very well, still keep in touch with Chris Eigeman who played Rimmer. I think there are many reasons behind why NBC didn't pick up the series, if I remember correctly they made nine pilots that year, three in their own studios, where RD was originally going to be made, and the rest in Universal studios where RD was made. They picked up the three they made in their own studios and dumped the rest. But who knows?

You don't seem in the least bit tired of playing Kryten. Are there things you've done to keep the character fresh and yourself from getting bored?

It's a fascinating character to play, and when you think, on average, I am making a Red Dwarf for three months every two years, it doesn't take up the majority of my time. I do a lot of other stuff too.

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(Robert Llewellyn...continued)

You've done other television apart from RD. Which of your other TV projects have you enjoyed the most?

Scrapheap, the show I've just finished for Channel 4. It's brilliant fun to make and I learn a great deal too. Scrapheap is an engineering challenge show where two teams have to build amazing machines of our devising from the junk they find on a scrapheap, in just one day. It's a knock out contest and out of the 8 teams that start, only two will make it through to the Scrapheap Challenge Final.

In the past teams have made truly extraordinary devices, like diving bells, seige engines, power pullers, off road buggies, gliders, sea going lifting gear. Not to be missed!

You're also an accomplished author. When did you start writing and what were your first efforts like?

I started writing as soon as I could hold a pencil, I've always done it. I tried to write novels when I was about 20, gave up and started writing comedy scripts instead, which worked! That's what dragged me onto a stage, I never had any desire to be an actor or comedian until it was too late and I had become one. I now spend more or less every working day writing, novels, screen plays and sit coms.

You've written a couple of memoirs and have just published a novel entitled *Punchbag*. What is it about and what inspired you to write it?

The book tells the story of Nick Gardner, nightclub bouncer and good time guy who becomes, almost against his will, a padded assailant in a women's self defense class. His job is to wear a seriously padded suit, to then assault women in a most unpleasant way and get the living daylight beaten out of him for five hours a day. He goes to San Francisco to learn this most noble of skills and re-meets his 15 year old son, Barney, a boy he has never really looked after. Nick has to confront all the things he'd rather not think about, women and why they might be scared of him, sex, violence and whether you can confront it with more violence. Nick is challenged to the very limit of sanity by what happens to him. It's a coming of age story about a man who should have grown up at least fifteen years sooner.

Do you have a wife and children? If so, how do your children react to seeing their father on television?

I have a wife and two children, and they are not the least bit impressed by seeing their dad on television. I suppose it's normal for them, it's always been that way

Are you a very disciplined person? How do you find the time to write along with television work and other projects?

I am a very disciplined person but I live in chaos, I have 2 young children and I spend a lot of time looking after them. I love doing that, and gardening, and cooking, and every now and then, in a dull moment, I write like crazy to try and catch up.

You maintain a terrific Web site. What caused you to put up your homepage and are you a big fan of the Internet?

I really enjoy having the web site, although I can't find enough time to update it as often as I would like. I am planning a big re-design this summer. It was meeting American fans and being asked, "Where's your web-site?" and I had no idea what they were talking about. I use the Internet for research for my work, I love it, I e-mail like a pro.

What's the latest on the future of the *Red Dwarf* movie and/or Series 9? Are there any changes you'd like to see made in the show?

I have no idea about changes to the show, that's Doug's job. I am seeing him this week so I'll ask him about the movie, as far as I know we are making it in 2000 and it is due to be released in 2001.

What other projects do you have in the works? Craig Charles, Chris Barrie and Norman Lovett have all recently done stand-up tours - any chance you'd want to do that or do you prefer writing and television work?

I'd love to do a stand up tour, but I am far too busy doing other things. I am embarking on numerous other projects which are too delicate to discuss at this point, plus another series of Scrapheap next year.

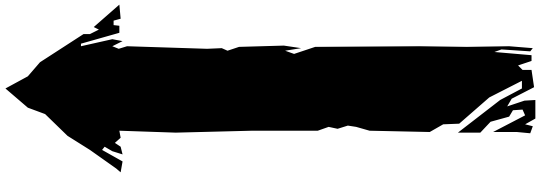
Who do you feel are the new talents to watch on the UK comedy scene?

Not the person to ask. I spent 15 years working the UK live comedy scene and am still in deep retirement, so I don't see anything. I'm sure there's loads of new and totally brilliant people about, for me Eddie Izzard is still new and brilliant.

And finally, would you like some toast?

I can't eat toast, or any other organic food matter, but if you have some WD/40 with a dash of sodium nitrate, that would be very pleasant.

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This Way to BallyK

A Beginner's Guide by Neil Hopkins

The day is bright and clear as you drive through the Wicklow hills, although you can see some clouds gathering in the distance. Maybe rain later? You begin to wonder if you've missed the turning, when you pass a large and rather luxurious house and see two men standing by a pile of bricks drinking tea. Before you have a chance to open your mouth a smartly dressed businessman storms up to the men and shouts -

"Liam. Donal. I'm paying you to build a wall, not to stand around all day!"

"We were just taking a break, Mr Quigley, sir" says the taller man in the baseball cap.

"We're entitled to regular tea breaks" adds his somewhat more gormless companion under his breath.

"Not if you haven't actually started work, you're not."

He turns to you and apologizes for the pair of workshy eejits that pass for his employees, before giving you the directions you need. It is not long before you reach the village, and call into the shop to buy some postcards. The lady behind the counter is talking to a grey haired priest in an agitated manner.

"I'm not happy about Father Clifford, Father - really not happy at all"

"I'm sorry Kathleen - this is not an ideal situation by any stretch of the imagination, but Bishops move in mysterious ways ..."

After paying for your cards, you come out of the shop to see a young Garda writing a parking ticket for your car - he hands it to you with a wry grin, and advises you to park up behind Fitzgerald's Bar.

"How did you know that's where I was heading?"

"Well, most folk end up there sooner or later - enjoy your stay."

Entering the bar, you find a bright and comfortable interior - nothing like the dark and smoky pub that you had expected. The young woman behind the bar greets you with a smile -

"Assumpta's not here at the moment, but I expect she's got a room free. Did Ambrose give you that ticket? Don't worry I'll have words with him. Now, what will you be having to drink - we've no Guinness I'm afraid - but the lager is quite nice. I'm Niamh, by the way"

As she pauses for breath, you take your beer to the end of the bar and are drawn into conversation with some of the regulars - Padraig, the local garage owner, Brendan, the amiable teacher whose liberal views put him at odds with the church dominated school board and Siobhan, the vet, a lady who you imagine when not wearing muddy wellington boots and farm clothes would be rather attractive.

You leave your new friends to their gossip, and take a final turn around the village. On the bridge you can see a young man, dressed in black and obviously deep in thought. A young woman approaches, says a few words and touches him briefly yet tenderly on the arm. They part, she heading for the bar and he for the church, fixing a white priests collar around his neck as he goes.

A last look at the sky - there's a storm brewing - better take shelter.

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(Ballykissangel...continued)

Welcome to *Ballykissangel*. At its center is the story of an idealistic young English priest coming to work in a small town in the heart of Ireland. Taken at face value, the charming collection of characters - eccentrics, entrepreneurs and eejits - not to mention the stunning picture postcard scenery, disguise a darker and more serious thread that runs through the series. The spiky relationship between Father Clifford (played by Stephen Tompkinson) and Assumpta Fitzgerald (played by Dervla Kirwan) has enough unresolved sexual tension to make Mulder and Scully give up and go home, but it forms the foundation for stories that examine the conflicts between faith and reason, idealism and pragmatism and love and duty.

Ballykissangel has a large cast of supporting characters, who all feature equally in the many overlapping storylines. Ambrose Egan, the naive young guard, and Niamh, strong willed daughter of Brian Quigley, enjoy a similarly turbulent relationship that takes center stage when Assumpta and Peter leave the series at the end of the third season (and if you don't want to spoil your enjoyment of the series, you really don't want to know why).

Brian Quigley, the entrepreneur businessman and his dozy sidekicks Liam and Donal with their various business ventures, highlight the conflict between the march of development and those who would like things to stay just the way they are. Brian may act the hard-nosed type, but he does have a softer side that occasionally shows, particularly when Niamh gives him a good talking to.

Father Mac, the priest in charge and Kathleen, the owner of the local shop and church stalwart, represent different sides of the small 'c' conservative side of the Catholic church. Father Mac tends towards the pragmatic, whilst being sure to maintain appearances in order to appease Kathleen. Has he really compromised his faith with his string pulling and behind the scenes deals with the likes of Brian Quigley? Father Peter would think so, but then he hasn't been a parish priest for as long as Father Mac. In contrast, Kathleen holds the church together with unceasing hard work by way of cleaning, flower arranging and the numerous unsung jobs that somebody has to do but nobody ever notices until they are left undone.

Brendan the teacher, Siobhan the vet, Pdraig the mechanic and Doc Ryan, the, er, doctor, do a lot more than prop up the bar in Fitzgeralds. They really are the pillars of the local community, and their individual lives each come to the fore in turn. Characters have come and gone during the series, but each is sharply delineated and are quickly accepted as "family" by viewers who fall under the spell of *BallyK*.

One concession to the traditional stereotype of the wily Irish farmer is Eamon, played by the now deceased Birdy Sweeney. He does serve as more than simple comic relief, and I suspect that he is all too aware that if you act the fool, then occasionally folk will let you get away with a sight more than you otherwise might.

So, that is BallyK, which takes the usual stereotypes of Irish small town life and subtly subverts them with gentle humor. Thus we have such delights as confessional boxes with built in fax machines, fake wooden sheep to foil EU spy satellites and an Irish bar without any Guinness - but the whimsy never overwhelms the drama. The spiritual issues are handled with sensitivity and care, and are unlikely to cause offense whatever your religious persuasion (or lack of it), but they provoke at least a little inner reflection whilst leaving you with a smile on your face.

And that, surely, is no bad thing...

Did You Know?

- **Stephen Tompkinson** starred in the sitcom *Drop the Dead Donkey* and also in the movie *Brassed Off*.
- **Dervla Kirwan** starred with Nicholas Lyndhurst as Phoebe Bamford in the first three series of *Goodnight Sweetheart*.
- Dervla and Stephen are a couple in real life.
- The show is filmed on location in Avoca and Enniskerry, County Wicklow, Ireland as well as Ardmore studios in Bray, County Wicklow, Ireland.
- There have been four home videos released containing episodes of *Ballykissangel*.
- For the 1997 Comic Relief event, Stephen and Dervla appeared with Dawn French in *BallykissDibley*, a brief skit during which French's character from the Vicar of Dibley took quite a shine to Father Clifford.

Deflating pompous snobs has long been a comedy staple, especially in Britain, where class and social status have always played a keen role. Think of Basil Fawlty, Rigsby in Rising Damp or even Red Dwarf's resident git, Arnold J. Rimmer.

However, there may be nothing that says snobbery better than the lines "The Bucket residence. The lady of the house speaking." Of course, Bucket must be pronounced "Bouquet" (it's French, you know) and the lady of the house is the epitome of social correctness and manners, Hyacinth Bucket. For those who aren't of the proper socioeconomic status to have been introduced, just think of Hyacinth as Martha Stewart's evil twin. However, she considers herself "just a typical British housewife living in a typical British detached house with net curtains, a well-behaved garden and Westminster chimes on the doorbell."

For five series, Patricia Routledge has ruled the roost as that prissy, proper monster in posh frocks Hyacinth Bucket. Keeping Up Appearances has also ruled the roost on PBS as one of British comedy's most enduring and popular imports. So get out your best china and dress appropriately as we answer some "Frequently Asked Questions" about:

Keeping Up Appearances

How many episodes of KUA are there?

There were 44 episodes made between 1990 and 1995. This includes 42 episodes of thirty minutes each, one hour-long episode and one fifty-minute episode. There was also a short special shown as part of a *Children in Need* charity telethon.

Who wrote this series?

KUA was written by the phenomenally prolific Roy Clarke, who at the same time was writing the classic *Last of the Summer Wine*. Clarke, now retired, also wrote the successful Ronnie Barker sitcom *Open All Hours*.

Where did Patricia Routledge get her start?

In the theater. Indeed, it may come as a shock to know that Ms. Routledge is actually from the gritty north of England. She was born in Birkenhead (near Liverpool), the much-loved daughter of a haberdasher named Issac and his wife,

(Keeping Up Appearances...continued)

Catherine, who died when Patricia was just 20. She became a bit of a disruptive show-off at the local high school, but went on to study English at Liverpool University. She planned to be a teacher, but involvement with local plays and work as an unpaid assistant stage manager at Liverpool Playhouse caused her to change direction. She then left home to attend the Old Vic Theatre School in Bristol and the rest is history.

What kind of roles did she play before she became Hyacinth?

Her list of appearances is too long and varied to mention all of them here, but they include extensive work in theater, films and television. One of her first starring role in a sitcom, however, was as Marjorie Belton in the 1985 series *Marjorie and Men*. Marjorie is a divorcee who returns home to live with her mother, who is determined to find her daughter another husband.

Ms. Routledge also had roles in the films *To Sir With Love*, *The Bliss of Mrs. Blossom* and appeared on the popular soap *Coronation Street*, as did her KUA co-stars Geoffrey Hughes and Josephine Tewson.

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Can Patricia Routledge actually sing?

She certainly can. Her performance in the Jules Styne musical *Darling of the Day* earned her a Tony Award in 1968 for Best Actress in a Musical. She has appeared in numerous other musicals, sang Leonard Bernstein's *Candide* in 1998 with the London Symphony Orchestra and even recorded an album of her favorite songs called *Presenting Patricia Routledge*.

What kind of roles did Clive Swift play before he became Richard Bucket?

He appeared in a satirical series during 1963 and 1964 called (and I am not making this up) *Dig This Rhubarb*. *DTR* was a satirical program also featuring the great John Fortune and the performers would debate a current topic by way of historical writings.

Swift also played Ernie Nesbitt, the father of a roving band of crooks, in the 1980 ITV comedy *The Nesbitts Are Coming*.

Is Clive Swift any relation to the actor David Swift?

Yes, indeed. Clive is the younger brother of David, who showed off his own comedic chops as pompous newsreader Henry Davenport on *Drop the Dead Donkey*. Swift was also married to famed British author Margaret Drabble, and the couple had three children.

Who are the other members of Hyacinth's family?

Hyacinth's sisters Rose and Daisy are played by Mary Millar (who replaced the original Rose, Shirley Stelfox, after the first series) and Judy Cornwell respectively. Rose is a man-hungry vixen who goes through a string of boyfriends during the series. Hyacinth often gets her hopes up that Rose's men will be men of proper social connections and status, but she's inevitably disappointed. In one episode, Rose's Greek boyfriend, Mr. Marenopoulous, comes to collect Hyacinth and Richard in hearse instead of the limousine Rose had promised, causing Hyacinth no end of embarrassment during her pre-dinner cocktail hour.

Daisy, on the other hand, lives her romantic life vicariously through one of the Harlequin type novels she's often seen reading. She has a husband, Onslow (*Geoffrey Hughes*), but he's a tremendous couch potato/slob who is much more interested in the races and drinking beer than in his wife.

Daisy, Rose and Onslow all share the same dilapidated house with the broken fence and take care of the girls' Daddy. Though he is beloved by all,

especially Hyacinth, Daddy isn't quite all there and keeps the family in continual chaos chasing him down after one of his escapades.

Finally, there is Violet (*Anna Dawson*), the one sister Hyacinth is actually proud to claim due to her Mercedes, sauna and a home that has room for a pony. Hyacinth loves mentioning Violet in the proper social setting, but leaves out the fact that her husband Bruce (a turf accountant) enjoys wearing Violet's clothes.

All of the sisters were named after flowers since "Mummy loved flowers and chose to name her daughters after the blooms that appeared in our splendid garden." A Hyacinth, as she explains, is "flower of exquisite perfume which blooms best indoors" and that suits her because she "blooms in the social environment."

Which character is often spoken about but never seen?

Sheridan, who is Hyacinth and Richard's son. The only way his character is established is through telephone calls and one brief glimpse of the back of his head. The fact that we get such a strong impression of him despite his absence is a tribute to Clarke's talent as a writer and Routledge's delivery of the lines.

In short, Sheridan (named after famed writer/politician Richard Brinsley Sheridan) is his mummy's pride and joy, a student at the Poly who shares her artistic leanings. She continually shows pictures of him and brags incessantly about his accomplishments. However, viewers are shown that Sheridan isn't exactly what Hyacinth *thinks*, and poor Richard is often exasperated at his son's constant pleas for money.

Who else lives on the Avenue?

Hyacinth's next door neighbor is Elizabeth (Josephine Tewson) who turns into a shaking, nervous, cup-breaking wreck when invited chez Bucket. She is too weak and polite to stand up to the domineering Hyacinth, but at the start of the second series she gets a sympathetic ear in the form of her brother Emmet. Emmett moves in after his divorce and becomes the object of Hyacinth's "affection" due to his musical ability. He then divides his time trying to avoid Hyacinth (she always sings at him to demonstrate her musical prowess) and feeling sorry for Richard. Also parts of the "Avenue set" are the Barker-Finches, live at number 23. They feature prominently

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The Insider Episode Guide: The Vicar of Dibley

Dawn French is best known in the UK as half of the comedy double act French and Saunders. However, Dawn and Jennifer Saunders aren't exactly tied at the hip and each has found success with "solo" projects. For French, this has meant starring roles in both Murder Most Horrid and The Vicar of Dibley. French will be soon donning her clerical robes and traveling to the village of Turville, Buckinghamshire (not far from where she lives) to film a third series as Geraldine Granger, The Vicar of Dibley. If you've missed out, here's the story so far.

Series 1, Episode 1: The Arrival: When Vicar Pottle dies unexpectedly during Evensong, the village of Dibley is left without spiritual leadership. The Bishop is quick to appoint a replacement and villagers are astonished to find that the new vicar is a woman named Geraldine. Not everyone approves, especially David Horton, who is particularly opposed to the idea of a female vicar. However, the chocolate loving, joke-cracking Geraldine brings new life and breath of fresh air to the small village.

Episode 2, Songs Of Praise: The BBC sends a crew to record an episode of *Songs of Praise* at Dibley's parish church. Suddenly, church attendance soars as everyone wants to be on television. Geraldine takes a fancy to the dishy young producer, while David Horton shows a definite interest in a young female member of the crew. The program, however, doesn't turn out quite as expected.

Episode 3, Community Spirit: Geraldine volunteers to organize the Autumn Fair, promising that a "celebrity" will perform the opening ceremony. Finding an available celebrity, however, proves a tricky task. When Alice tells her about her cousin, Reg Dwight, Geraldine assumes she means Elton John and arranges for him to open the Fair. Unfortunately, it's the wrong Reg Dwight! All ends happily, however, when a passing celebrity agrees to do the honors.

Episode 4, The Window And The Weather: One of the church's stained glass windows is broken during a storm, so Geraldine sets out to raise funds for a replacement window. She targets one of David Horton's rich friends as a donor and raises the money needed, but everyone seems to have a different idea of what the old window actually depicted. This leads to bickering and as usual, the end result isn't exactly what the villagers expected.

Episode 5, Election: Geraldine and David have a disagreement over the local bus service. As a result, the Vicar finds herself opposing David in the District Council elections and the fight is on to win votes and influence people.

Episode 6, Animals: Geraldine decides to hold a special church service for animals. David Horton tries to persuade the Bishop that the service is a bad idea and should be cancelled. Geraldine is determined to go ahead with it.

Special, The Easter Bunny: It's almost Easter and the members of the Church Committee decide what they'll give up for Lent. David Horton suggests that Geraldine give up chocolate. She agrees, but finds it hard going - especially when David tries his best to tempt her. Alice tells Geraldine about the Easter Bunny, which appears in the village every Easter and leaves eggs outside all of the houses. Geraldine thinks it's just a local tall tale until Letitia convinces her otherwise. When Letitia dies suddenly, she leaves Geraldine to carry on her legacy as the Easter Bunny.

Special. The Christmas Lunch Incident: As Christmas approaches, Geraldine is looking quite forward to opening all of the windows on her chocolate advent calendars. She accepts an invitation to Christmas lunch by Frank Pickle and Jim Trott, but subsequently receives other invitations from David, Alice and Owen. She can't bring herself to refuse any of them, so ends up having to eat four very large meals.

Series 2, Episode 1: Playing Cupid: Geraldine decides that it's about time Hugo and Alice became more closely involved. After some coaxing, Hugo finally kisses Alice. They enjoy this so much that they do little else during the days that follow. Hugo tells his father that he wants to marry Alice, but David is horrified and threatens to disown him if he goes ahead with his plans. Geraldine gets a proposal of marriage from Owen, but is rescued by the demon drink.

Episode 2, Dibley Live: Dibley gets its own radio station for a week and everyone is allotted their own time. The biggest shock, however, comes from Frank, who everyone thinks will be boring, but makes a surprise announcement.

Episode 3, Celebrity Vicar: Geraldine becomes a famous celebrity after appearing on a national radio program with no less than Terry Wogan. The fame goes to her head, but it's only temporary.

Episode 4, Love And Marriage: Alice and Hugo get married, but not before Geraldine bleaches her hair and takes a fancy to David Horton's brother. Alice, in the meantime, wants Tellytubby bridesmaids.

Vicar of Dibley regular cast members:

*Geraldine Granger...Dawn French
David Horton...Gary Waldhorn
Hugo Horton...James Fleet
Alice Tinker...Emma Chambers
Frank Pickle...John Bluthal
Owen Newitt...Roger Lloyd Pack
Letitia Croyley...Liz Smith
Jim Trott...Trevor Peacock*

Classic Flashback: The Fall and Rise of Reginald Perrin

By Ricky Fluke

It's hard to think of anyone who dealt with mid-life crisis -- or "male menopause" -- more creatively than Reginald Iolanthe Perrin. Maybe Don Quixote, but then he didn't make a million pounds selling rubbish. Michaelangelo made no effort to teach the Medicis to live in peace and harmony. Tolstoy did give up all his royalties and start a religious commune, but he neglected to get his secretary in bed and then send her slithering down a drainpipe. And Gauguin? Hah. Didn't even turn up at his own memorial service. But Reggie did.

The Fall and Rise of Reginald Perrin was adapted from a series of books by David Nobbs, who drew inspiration from the real-life antics of a former labour minister. While simultaneously playing Rigsby in Rising Damp, Leonard Rossiter gave what may have been the performance of his career in this classic sitcom that aired from 1976 - 1979.

Series One: 7 episodes, based on "The Death of Reginald Perrin."

Reggie Perrin, 46, senior sales executive at Sunshine Desserts. Married, two children, both grown and moved away. He's stuck in a rut, as he explains to his cat Ponsonby.

"Every day I get up, dress, go downstairs, have breakfast, walk down Coleridge Close, turn right into Tennyson Avenue, then left into Wordsworth Drive, go down the snicket into Station Road, catch the train, arrive at Waterloo twenty-two minutes late, walk to Sunshine Desserts, dictate letters, send memos, make decisions, hold conferences, make decisions, send memos, dictate letters, leave Sunshine Desserts, walk to Waterloo, catch the train, arrive at Climthorpe twenty-two minutes late, walk along Station Road, up the snicket, up Wordsworth Drive, turn right into Tennyson Avenue, then left into Coleridge Close, enter the house I left that morning, have supper, go up the stairs I came down that morning put on the pyjamas I took off that morning, clean the teeth I cleaned that morning, and get into the bed I left that morning. Is that success, Ponsonby?" (Ponsonby meowed, reserving judgment.)

Reggie's world contains an endearing and infuriating assortment of family and colleagues.

ELIZABETH, his wife, Middle-aged, still attractive, loyal to Reggie. Every workday morning she initiates the first of Reggie's many daily rituals.

ELIZABETH: Briefcase.

REGGIE: Thank you, darling

ELIZABETH: Umbrella.

REGGIE: Thank you, darling.

ELIZABETH: Have a nice day at the office.

REGGIE: I won't.

PETER, a fellow commuter. Chronic postnasal drip.

PETER: You wouldn't have any tissues would you, Reggie?

REGGIE: Sorry, no, but I'm finished with my Luton On The Move color supplement.

JOAN, Reggie's secretary. Seconds before Reggie arrives in his office, she hears his footsteps, removes her glasses, smooths her skirt and smiles with secretly lustful anticipation. Reggie enters, tosses his umbrella toward the hatstand and misses.

REGGIE: Morning Joan. Twenty-two minutes late. A badger ate a junction box at New Malden. Take a letter please, Joan.

JOAN: Certainly, Mr. Perrin. (She sits in front of him, crossing her legs. Reggie notices.)

REGGIE: To the Saucy Calendar Company, Buff Road, Orpington. Dear Sirs, Could you please quote me for a hundred and fifty saucy calendars to keep our male staff in a constant state of..

TONY and **DAVID**, Sunshine salesmen. Young and enthusiastic. Verbally challenged.

REGGIE: Ah, come in, Tony, David. About this new Exotic Ices project.

TONY: Great.

DAVID: Super.

REGGIE: I expect both of you will have key parts to play.

DAVID: Super.

REGGIE: We'll meet with C.J. this afternoon.

TONY: Great.

DAVID: Super.

C.J., Reggie's boss. Tyrannical. Manipulative. Bald. Always prompt for their meetings, Reggie knocks on C.J.'s door.

C.J.: One, two, three, four... Make 'em stand outside the door
Five, six seven, eight... Always pays to make 'em wait.
Nine, ten, eleven, twelve... COME!

(continued on next page)

Reggie Perrin, cont'd. from page 9)

DOC MORRISSEY, the Sunshine house physician.

DOC: *Take your clothes off. Put them over there, on top of mine.*

REGGIE: *What?*

DOC: *It's a little joke. Puts the patient at his ease.*

(Years later...)

REGGIE: *Well, how are things with you, Doc?*

DOC: *I got dismissed from the British Medical Association.*

REGGIE: *Oh dear. What was it for?*

DOC: *Gross professional incompetence.*

REGGIE: *Oh dear oh dear. Are you depressed?*

DOC: *No. No. Southall's a million laughs. And I find a certain consolation, Reggie, in the knowledge that by being the worst doctor in England I have saved somebody else from that ignominy. No man's life is entirely pointless.*

JIMMY, Elizabeth's brother. Retired army major. His military habits and speech patterns don't die - they don't even fade away.

JIMMY: *Know the first thing I did when my wife left me? Pressed my trousers. Adage of old Colonel Warboys. Nothing looks quite as black when your creases are sharp. Mustard for creases, old Warboys. Hated the Free Poles. No creases. Sorry. Talking too much. Hogging limelight. Nerves.*

LINDA, Reggie & Elizabeth's daughter. A voluptuous young married woman with two children. Inherited her mother's perspicacity. A far more interesting character in the books than in the TV series; in fact, it's hard to recall anything she said, except "Stop calling me Squelchypoos," directed at...

TOM, Linda's husband. Bearded, pipe-smoking estate agent. Makes his own homemade wines, from blackberries, prunes, sprouts, turnips. Completely revolting. So are the wines.

TOM: *I'm not a _____ person.*

(Fill in the blank with: Sport, Joke, Mystery, Charity, Mid-week lunch, etc., etc.)

These people inhabit the comfortable world that Reggie wants so desperately to escape.

Once Reggie decides to burn his bridges behind, before, and underneath him, the rest is simple. He tries and fails to sleep with Joan; gives a drunken, rambling speech at an industry conference; says good-bye to Elizabeth; steals a company lorry; leaves a note under his boss's door reading "Blood will flow;" pumps raspberry syrup into a river upstream from C.J.'s fishing party; fakes his own suicide; and attends his own memorial service.

Despite this elaborate escape, Reggie can't stay away from his old life. He returns disguised as Martin Wellbourne, a

fictitious, bearded friend of Reggie's from South America.

"Martin" marries Elizabeth and briefly takes a job at Sunshine Desserts as Director of the Reginald Perrin Memorial Foundation, until he's sacked by C.J. as an impostor. Dropping the Martin disguise and taking up a new one - this time out of shame rather than espionage - he goes to work at Pelham's Piggery, "in a mucking-out capacity." Meanwhile, Elizabeth joins the workforce - at Sunshine Desserts, of all places, unbeknownst to Reggie.

Series Two: 7 episodes, based on the novel "The Return of Reginald Perrin."

Reggie now seems worse off than he was before, much worse, until he has the idea that will sweep the country. Since people persist in buying rubbish, he reasons, why not open a shop that sells nothing *but* rubbish? No deception necessary: announce publicly - on the shop windows and in advertisements - that everything in the shop is totally useless. Charge exorbitant prices - the more awful the item, the higher the price. Call the shop Grot.

He starts small, selling Tom's homemade wines, his dentist's nauseous paintings, Elizabeth's tasteless puddings, square hoops, and a complicated board game without rules or instructions. Soon, to Reggie's amazement, Grot is a hit.

Customers besiege the shop, paying premium prices for worthless gifts for unloved loved ones. Reggie opens Grot shops all over Britain, then in Europe. He builds factories to manufacture custom-designed rubbish. He buys an office complex to house Grot headquarters and his own office - with two phones. His ultimate triumph comes with the bankruptcy of Sunshine Desserts: he graciously gives C.J. a job.

Reggie has come full circle, only to find that it's really a square hoop. Again, he's sickened by the rat race. Again, he wants to escape, but not, this time, by faking a suicide. He begins to plot the destruction of the Grot empire, by sabotage from the top.

First, he hires Seamus Finnegan, whom Reggie first saw outside a pub, "with a pink face weaving gently along the pavement."

REGGIE: *Have you ever worked in management?*

SEAMUS: *No, sir. My genius for management remains a secret between me and my Maker.*

REGGIE: *Do you have any experience of administration?*

SEAMUS: *No, sir, that's one fellow I've never met.*

REGGIE: *I would like you to be my Admin Officer.*

SEAMUS: *Would you be having a bit of fun, sir, with a simple Irishman from the land of the bogs and the little people?*

REGGIE: *I'm offering you the job.*

SEAMUS: *Jesus Christ! I'd better bloody take it, then, before you change your mind.*

(continued on page 19)

The Insider *PREVIEWS AND REVIEWS*

New Shows, Web Sites, and Books

New in Syndication

Dad

*Written by Andrew Marshall
Starring George Cole, Kevin McNally and Julia Hills*

Writer Andrew Marshall has followed up his successful sitcom *2.4 Children* with another look at family life. This time, however, he delves into the relationship between three generations of men in the Hook family.

The patriarch is Brian Hook, played by sitcom veteran George Cole. He has never had a close relationship with his son Alan (Kevin McNally) until Brian's serious illness causes a reevaluation of their relationship. His father still drives him crazy, but Alan now has a second chance to get to know him.

The formerly distant relationship between Brian and Alan is mirrored in that of Alan and his own son Vincent, played by Toby Ross-Bryant. Alan makes pathetic attempts to be cool around his son and relate to him more as a friend than as a father, but it doesn't work. In one episode, the police show up to inform Alan that he has left his car unlocked. After thoroughly embarrassing himself in front of the agents, Alan tries to look better in the eyes of his son by calling them "pigs" after their departure. Vincent is singularly unimpressed.

Every sitcom family needs a calm, sane center and in *Dad*, it's provided by Julia Hills, who was memorable as the man-hungry Rona in *2.4 Children*. She doesn't get the flashy scenes, but is reliable and appealing as the Alan's wife, the woman in the middle.

Dad is beautifully scripted by Marshall, who lets the humor flow from characters, themes and situations we can all relate to. The cast works well together as an ensemble to hit all the right notes and makes the Hook family one you'll definitely want to get to know.

New In Syndication

Happy Families

Written by Ben Elton

Starring Jennifer Saunders and Adrian Edmondson

Poor Guy Fuddle. He desperately wants a happy family, but all he has is a mean ol' Granny who despises him for reasons he doesn't understand and four sisters who scattered out around the globe long ago and have become strangers to him.

Then suddenly his dream that they will one day be reunited as a happy family seems set to become reality. The ailing Granny mysteriously orders him to find his four sisters and bring them to her bedside as she has something she needs to tell them. Guy obediently goes off to round up his sisters.

So begins the first episode of *Happy Families*, a sitcom Ben Elton was inspired to write after seeing Alec Guinness play numerous roles in the classic Ealing film *Kind Hearts and Coronets*. He then decided to write a series that would give its star, Jennifer Saunders, the ability to play multiple characters a la Guinness.

Indeed, *Absolutely Fabulous* star Saunders gives a tour-de-force performance as the crotchety Granny Fuddle and her four granddaughters: Cassie, Roxanne, Joyce, and Madeline. After the initial set up during which Guy is sent off, the following four episodes follow him as he rounds up his sisters. His travels take him to L.A., where Cassie is a big television star; and then on to France, where Madeline is living in an artistic commune lorded over by the pretentious poet/porn merchant Dalcroix. After that, he finds his sister Joyce is a novice nun who's driving the Mother Superior crazy, and last, he finds Roxanne is an inmate as a women's prison. For various reasons, the girls find the offer to return to the Fuddle home irresistible, and in the last episode they are all together and learn Granny's "secret."

This sitcom is highly recommended not only for Jennifer Saunders in a bravura breakthrough performance, but also for the wonderful cameos by Chris Barrie, Rik Mayall and other stars of the "alternative" comedy scene.

SYNDICATION NOTE

BBC Worldwide Americas will be making a closed-caption version of Keeping Up Appearances available to stations.

REVIEWS: BRITISH TV ON THE WEB AND NEW BOOKS

SPOTTED ON THE INTERNET

By David Bibb

Sarah's Groovy Ballykissangel Site
<http://www.geocities.com/TelevisionCity/7492/> offers everything from Fan Fiction to "cute quotes" from the series. The best features of the site though are the reviews of the episodes and the biographies of the stars. The reviews, though short, are very well written. The site features frames but can be navigated using LYNX. The page design is nicely done and works equally well for both graphical and non-graphical browsers. *I'm giving this site 4 mouse clicks.*

The Rowan Atkinson Page
<http://www.hsn.dk/rowan/> offers everything one could ask for in a site. Naturally a biography of the actor is included, but even more interesting, a section links to <http://www.amazon.com> and <http://www.reel.com> where one can purchase books and videos of Rowan Atkinson's shows and movies. It features a good list of links to other sites devoted to the comic. Although the site is designed with frames it is easy to navigate using LYNX. With the information on this site, and the links to the other sites, *I give it 4 mouse clicks.*

The Fall and Rise of Reginald Perrin an Episode Guide:
http://www.xnet.com/~djk/FallandRiseofReginaldPerrin_2.shtml. With this page the fan gets a good list of the episodes. The site has a nice clean interface and, except for a few tables is LYNX friendly. *I give it 3 1/2 mouse clicks.*

Brits Purveyors of British Goods
<http://www.britsusa.com>
"From Weetabix to chocolate bars, from flags to jewelry and from Sherlock Holmes to the Young Ones, we carry anything British." So says the web site of this store and so it

does. For those lucky enough to live in Lawrence, Kansas, access to things British only requires a drive downtown to this delightful store. The store features anything and everything from the British Isles [Ireland, Wales, Scotland, and England] with a large collection of BBC videotapes and books for sale. I've been able to get materials there I've not found or been able to order anywhere else. At the moment, I'm sipping Lifeboat Tea, watching Red Dwarf 7 bytes 1-3, and looking at the imported can of vindaloo I plan on eating while watching the series - all purchased from this very friendly company. And if they don't have it, they will try to get it for you. *I'm giving this site 4 1/2 mouse clicks.*

Also recommended:

The Unofficial Patricia Routledge Fan Club:

<http://members.aol.com/UPRFC/UPRFC.html>

Kryten's Homepage

<http://www.llew.co.uk/>

Keeping Up Appearances Sounds and Pictures

<http://britcoms.com/kua/>

Ballykissangel Fan Page

<http://www.geocities.com/TelevisionCity/9171/BallyK.html>

Amazon.com British site

<http://www.amazon.co.uk>

Disclaimer: Please remember that the World Wide Web is an ever-changing place. Sites close down or move on a regular basis. The sites reviewed and recommended in this issue are operational at the date of publication. The Insider regrets any inconvenience caused by sites that move or close.

Books: *Best of the Britcoms*

By Garry Berman

What do you do when you have almost 100 videos full of British comedy threatening to take over your living room and kitchen, not to mention your life? Well, if you're self-confessed Anglophile Garry Berman, you take what's on those videos and create the new book, *Best of the Britcoms*. And for comedy fans everywhere, there is much rejoicing.

Beginning with *Dad's Army* and concluding with *The Thin Blue Line*, this book is an informative, genial tour of the best British sitcoms to hit the American shores from the 70s through the present day. The classics such as *Blackadder*, *Fawlty Towers*, *Yes, Minister* and *Yes, Prime Minister* are all presented and accounted for, yet raucous, not ready for PBS fare such as *The Young Ones* and *Absolutely Fabulous* are given their due as well.

Programs are listed in chronological order by the original British air date. Each is given a separate entry beginning with a cast list and transmission details. Berman then explains the premise behind the series and give a run-down of a typical episode or two, enabling readers who may have not seen a particular series to get a flavor of the program. Additional background is provided with comments from writers, directors and producers.

The book is further enhanced with "Short Takes" about Britcoms that didn't have a long shelf life here in the States, plus a look at failed attempts by American networks to create their own versions of popular British programs. A list of videos to available for purchase is also included.

The obvious worry about a book like this is that it can become quickly outdated, so let's hope Berman sees this as an ongoing project and not just a one-off.

Question is, though, why have we waited so long? For over twenty years, networks such as PBS and Comedy Central have brought British television stateside, yet fans have found it difficult to obtain information about these shows and their stars. No reason to fret any longer, though, because *Best of the Britcoms* has come to the rescue. (*Best of the Britcoms is scheduled for publication in October 1999.*)

BITS AND BOBS

British TV Trivia: Take The Challenge

Test your British TV IQ with the following questions. Answers are at the bottom of the page.

- 1.) Which 'Allo 'Allo cast member is actually American?
- 2.) Which comedy star wrote and performs the theme to *One Foot in the Grave*?
- 3.) What kind of car does Mr. Bean drive?
- 4.) What recent hit movie features appearances by *Blackadder's* Tim McInnerny, James Dreyfus of *The Thin Blue Line* and *The Vicar of Dibley's* Emma Chambers?
- 5.) Wendy Richard of *AYBS?* went on to star in which popular soap opera?
- 6.) What brand of china does Hyacinth Bucket proudly own?
- 7.) What was the name of Mrs. Slocombe's favorite feline?
- 8.) What is the full name of the character Stephen Fry plays in *Blackadder Goes Forth*?
- 9.) What is the name of the manor that Penelope Keith loses (and eventually regains) in *To The Manor Born*?
- 10.) What actress appeared in both *Good Neighbors (The Good Life)* and *Solo*?

EDITOR'S CHOICE: TOP FIVE SECOND BANANAS

Here are my choices for the Top Five second bananas on my favorite British shows. Let me know your own!

- 5.) **Paul Eddington** - *Good Neighbors (The Good Life)* - It must've been hard competing with Penelope Keith's scene-stealing Margot, but Eddington more than held his own.
- 4.) **Frances de la Tour** - *Rising Damp* - Her portrait of the love-starved Miss Jones was both funny and very touching. Honorable mention goes to her co-star, Richard Beckinsale.
- 3.) **Norman Lovett** - *Red Dwarf* - Hattie Hayridge did well when she took over from him, but no one could beat the wonderfully deadpan Lovett as the computer Holly on *Red Dwarf*. All you have to do is look at him and you want to laugh. His return in Series 8 was very welcome.
- 2.) **Tony Robinson** - *Blackadder* - The loyal sidekick to Edmund Blackadder throughout four series, he was perhaps the best dimwit ever to grace British television, except for...
- 1.) **Andrew Sachs** - *Fawlty Towers* - As the waiter from Barcelona, Manuel, Sachs had to suffer the outrageous slings and arrows of John Cleese's abuse. Sure, he had a great script to work from and a funny accent, but his timing was spot-on and his characterization remains indelibly etched on the minds of fans.

Get to know GORDEN KAYE

Where you may have seen him: As café owner/man of international intrigue Rene Artois in *'Allo 'Allo*.

Can also seen in: Terry Gilliam's movies *Jabberwocky* and *Brazil*.

Born: Moldgreen, Huddersfield (Yorkshire)

How he got the gig: Guest starred on *Are You Being Served?* and co-starred on the short-lived Mollie Sugden sitcom *Come Back, Mrs. Noah* prior to being picked to star in *'Allo 'Allo*.

Low point: A horrible car accident in 1990, during the time he was appearing in the stage production of *'Allo 'Allo*. It left him with massive head injuries that required six hours of surgery to repair.

Quick bit of trivia: The odd spelling of his first name is actually the result of a typing error made by Actor's Equity.

ANSWERS: 1.) *Guy Siner (Lt. Gruber)* 2.) *Eric Idle of Monty Python.* 3.) *A Mini.* 4.) *Notting Hill, starring Julia Roberts and Hugh Grant, written by Richard Curtis.* 5.) *EastEnders, playing the character of Pauline Fowler.* 6.) *Royal Doulton (with the hand-painted periwinkles.)* 7.) *Tiddles* 8.) *General Sir Anthony Cecil Hogmanay Melchett.* 9.) *Grantleigh Manor* 10.) *Felicity Kendal.*

If your score was higher than six, consider yourself ready for the Master Edition.

Rowan Atkinson (cont'd. from page 1)

Early Days

Rowan Sebastian Atkinson was born January 6, 1955 in Consett, County Durham. His father was a gentleman farmer named Eric and his mother a housewife named Ella May. He was the last of three children and after his brothers Rodney and Rupert opted for business careers, it was almost preordained that Rowan would take over the family farm. However, his childhood love of tinkering with machinery combined with viewing classic comedies like *Dad's Army* caused his interests to veer into two wildly different directions: the world of science and the art of making people laugh.

This was something he'd already been doing quite a while. He was a very bright, but also highly mischievous, student. His gift for pranks led one of his headmasters to suggest for the first time ever that a student enter showbiz. Rowan did a drama course in Portsmouth, but still unsure of a career in entertainment, attended Newcastle University. He graduated top of his class in Electrical and Electronic engineering and then continued his formal education at Queen's College, Oxford, eventually receiving the equivalent of a Master's degree in Engineering Science.

Life at University was not all academia. He indulged his love of performing with a radio show (*Atkinson's People*) on BBC 3 and became involved in Oxford theatrical revues. It was here he met two fellow students who would become the creative core of "Team Atkinson," not to mention lifelong friends: writer Richard Curtis and musician Howard Goodall.

The trio took a show to the 1976 Edinburgh Fringe, a yearly arts festival held in the Scottish capital. It proved a major turning point in Atkinson's career. He landed a powerful agent, Richard Armitage, who just happened

to have another client by the name of John Cleese.

A Star Is Born

The Edinburgh show was brought to London's West End as *Beyond A Joke* and Atkinson's talents were noticed by legendary ITV producer Humphrey Barclay. He signed Atkinson to do a television pilot called *Canned Laughter*, but, ever cautious, Atkinson decided not to do an entire series for fear of rushing things. After all, he'd only been out of university for six months.

Yet word of his prodigious talent was getting around and proof of the respect he was earning from his peers came with a performance at *The Secret Policeman's Ball*. This 1979 benefit, in aid of Amnesty International, brought together the greatest comic talents of the time, and Atkinson was asked to sit in with no less than the Pythons, replacing the absent Eric Idle in the Four Yorkshiremen skit about how tough life was in the good ol' days. You couldn't have asked for a higher comedic endorsement.

Not The Nine O'Clock News

Following that success, the time seemed right to tackle television. After a rough start that included delays and cast changes, producer John Lloyd finally assembled a dream team of Atkinson, Griff Rhys-Jones, Mel Smith, and Aussie comic actress Pamela Stephenson for *Not The Nine O'Clock News*, a program that would revive the art of satire in a big way.

Looking back at *Not The Nine O'Clock News* is like looking at a future who's who of British comedy. It made household names of the four virtually unknown stars, and its stable of writers was filled with now familiar names. Atkinson's old college mates Curtis and Goodall contributed, as did David Renwick (who would later go on to write *One Foot in the Grave* and *Jonathan Creek*), his then-writing partner Andrew Marshall (writer of *2.4 Children* and *Dad*), a pre-*Young Ones* Nigel Planer and his future *Comic Strip*

Presents cohort Peter Richardson, Ruby Wax, Clive Anderson of *Whose Line is it, Anyway?* and *Hitchhiker's Guide* author Douglas Adams

The premise was nothing new. *NTNOCN* was a fast-paced amalgam of skits and song parodies interspersed with fake news bulletins. However, the writing and performances were so sharp and the satire so keen that the show stirred up the sort of controversy that hadn't been seen since the peak of the satire boom during the early 60s.

In one memorable skit, a group of Muslims is shown bowing and praying while the voice-over says, "In Iran, the search continues for the Ayatollah Khomeini's contact lens." In another, the name of Polish leader Lech Walesa is brutally mispronounced over and over again during an awards ceremony.

Scurrilous, savage and very funny, *NTNOCN* was both a critical and ratings success during its four series run, winning an International Emmy Award and a British Academy Award.

Beyond The News

After four series and the obligatory spin-offs, the *NTNOCN* team decided it was time to move on to different projects. For Atkinson that meant a return to the theatre. In 1981, he did another one-man show and also spent a lot of time at awards ceremonies. He was voted Royal Variety Club Showbiz Personality of the Year and Comedy Performer of the Year by the Society of West End Theater Owners.

That year Atkinson also performed in the *Secret Policeman's Other Ball* and had a small role as a Brit consul in the James Bond film *Never Say Never Again*.

A Classic Is Created

His attention then turned to a series he and Curtis had been planning for quite a while. It was first

(continued on next page)

(Rowan Atkinson - continued)

envisioned as *Fawlty Towers* meets *Starky and Hutch*, but it ended up *The Black Adder*.

The first series of *The Black Adder* was transmitted starting in June of 1983 and by the time the series ended in 1989 with *Blackadder Goes Forth*, it had taken the descendants of Edmund Blackadder (and his faithful sidekick Baldrick) through medieval times all the way up to a very poignant finale set in the trenches of World War I.

Like *NTNOCN*, *Blackadder* got off to a rocky start. The first series was expensive and didn't quite live up to expectations, but luckily, the BBC seems more willing than its American counterparts to see a show through a "growing pains" period. Still, it took some talking to get a second series made. New BBC boss Michael Grade decided that the first just didn't have enough laughs per pound to justify its expense, so changes were made and the cost cut.

Good thing Grade relented, because the acid-tongued Edmund we remember best didn't appear until the second series, coinciding with the arrival of Ben Elton, who replaced Rowan as co-writer. Elton and Curtis worked together well, each writing without looking back and then swapping computer disks until the episode was banged out. With great scripts and a marvelous cast, it's no wonder that *Blackadder* is now considered on a par with the show they were trying to emulate - *Fawlty Towers* - as one of the all-time great sitcoms.

America Calls

In 1986, during a break from *Blackadder*, Rowan decided it was time to test the waters in America. To warm-up, he toured Canada and had another run on the West End.

The show allowed Atkinson to combine his skills as a physical comedian (as a student trying to cheat after studying the wrong thing) with

his verbal flair. One of the more memorable moments was "Fatal Beatings," in which he is a headmaster telling a father that his son is dead after being disciplined for library fines.

"If I wasn't making allowances for the fact that your son is dead," the headmaster explains, "he'd be out on his ear. He's lying up there in sick bay now stiff as a board and bright green. This is, I fear, typical of his current attitude."

The show opened on Broadway in October of 1986 as "Atkinson at The Atkinson" and closed after only fourteen performances. A few critics were kind, but it received an absolutely savage review where it really counted. *New York Times* writer Frank Rich ripped the show and British humor apart for what he saw as its obsession with potty jokes. "Were *Rowan Atkinson at The Atkinson* to be edited down to its wittiest jokes, however," he wrote, "even its title might have to go."

Ouch. America has a long history of being unkind to British performers, and sadly, Atkinson's first experience had done nothing to buck this trend. The criticism and failure may have hurt on a personal level, but professionally, it was just a blip on the screen. Atkinson returned to Britain and to the stage, doing a dramatic turn in a collection of short Chekov plays entitled *The Sneeze*. There was also *Blackadder The Third* with Atkinson in top form, aided and abetted by Hugh Laurie's endearing portrait of the very dim Prince Regent.

Rowan returned to the big screen in the 1989 film *The Tall Guy*. This romantic charmer, written by his old mate Richard Curtis and directed by his former *Not The Nine O'Clock News* cohort Mel Smith, features Jeff Goldblum as an American trying to make a living as an actor in London. The best gig he can find is as a sidekick to rubber-faced comic Ron Anderson (Atkinson.) On stage Ron is beloved and likeable, but off-stage he is a mean-spirited oaf who viciously

harangues his poor sidekick and everyone else around him.

Goldblum's character falls in love with a nurse played by Emma Thompson and in the end (because after all, this is a Richard Curtis script), everything turns out well. It is a sweet movie that avoids being too saccharine because of Atkinson's nasty character and the wicked shots Curtis takes at luvvie types and even Sir Andrew Lloyd Weber.

One has to wonder how much this reflects the real-life Curtis and Atkinson. The bespectacled Curtis seems to come through in his scripts as a sweet natured romantic, but sometimes the fangs come out and Atkinson provides a perfect voice for that part of his nature. It is easy to see this movie as a thinly veiled look at Rowan and his real-life stage sidekick Angus Deayton, but Atkinson tried to ensure in interviews that his character was an exaggeration.

Blackadder Goes Forth, the final series, was shown in 1989 and Atkinson put one of his greatest characters to rest. However, when one door closes another usually opens, and New Year's Day 1990 saw the birth of the character who would make him even more of a household name around the world. The irony of this is that Rowan, who was once turned down by the BBC for a job as a sound engineer, would end up making a fortune playing a character who barely makes a sound at all.

Mr. Bean

Whereas *Blackadder* showed Atkinson second only to John Cleese in his ability to dish the vitriol, *Mr. Bean* proved that he might just be the most gifted physical comedian since Charlie Chaplin. The beauty is in watching his ability to do so much with very little. It's in his face, those silly little noises, and that beanpole of a body. He can say more with a raised eyebrow than most comics can say with the aid of a full-length script.

(continued on next page)

(Rowan Atkinson continued)

Bean had its genesis not only in the work of Chaplin, (with a little Buster Keaton thrown in), but of French comic Jacques Tati, who in classics such as *Monsieur Hulot's Holiday*, provided further inspiration for what could be done with a silent character.

How to describe him? Atkinson has admitted that *Bean* is him as a nine-year old, while co-writer Curtis said he believes Mr. *Bean* was "abandoned at the age of six for being too annoying and had to bring himself up."

In any case, it goes back to childhood nicknames like Moonman, which give the impression that Atkinson has always been thought of as something not of this world. Indeed, the opening segment of *Mr. Bean*, which shows him falling to the ground bathed in a beam of light, seems to suggest that Mr. *Bean* himself is an alien who, according to television writer Mark Lewisohn may be a "God-sent missionary whose task was to irritate humankind."

You can say that again. But hey, Mr. *Bean* can't help it. Innocently, blithely and without (or, ok, maybe *with*) malice of forethought, he just creates chaos wherever he goes.

The *Bean* programs were transmitted sporadically (usually one a year) from 1990 to 1995, and its appeal has proven to be universal. The overwhelmingly visual nature of the program made any language barrier non-existent and *Mr. Bean* has been a success in such far off places as Hong Kong, Iceland and eighty other countries, proving that funny is funny anywhere.

1994 was an important year for Atkinson as he appeared in two of the year's biggest box office hits. In *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, his part was barely more than a cameo, but critics singled him out for his role as the novice Vicar who mangles a wedding ceremony in one of the film's funnier sequences.

Atkinson also lent his voice (and some facial characteristics) to Zazu, the hornbill who watches over the young Simba, in Disney's *The Lion King*.

Bean On The Big Screen

1997's hit movie *Bean* reunited Atkinson with *Tall Guy* director and former *NTNOCN* co-star Mel Smith.

The film has our hapless hero, the worst employee at London's National Gallery, being pawned off as an art expert and sent to accompany Whistler's Mother to America. He wreaks havoc not only on the poor painting, but the life of the family that offers him a place to stay.

Not surprisingly, the film was a financial success and took in over 100 million dollars in other parts of the world before it even opened in the States. Some felt that the character was too much to take in large doses, but it had a ready-made audience and was virtually a critic-proof film.

The Thin Blue Line

After being in silent Mr. *Bean* mode for quite a while, Atkinson returned to television and his verbal pyrotechnics for two series of *The Thin Blue Line*.

He plays Inspector Raymond Fowler of the Gasforth police station. Under his command is a motley assortment of characters, including Sgt. Patricia Dawkins (Fowler's live-in girlfriend), a constable named Kevin Goody, and the brightest of the lot, Maggie Habib. Their nemeses are the plain-clothed detectives, especially the arrogant, swaggering Dectective Grim, played by David Haig.

TTBL initially received some critical drubbing, perhaps because it was hard to believe this somewhat traditional sitcom came from the pen of Mr. Alternative, Radical Comedy himself, Ben Elton. However, the show improved as time went on and Atkinson almost became the straight man after James Dreyfus began stealing scenes as the fey Constable Goody. Once again, it is somehow

ironic that Elton, who railed against programs like *Are You Being Served?*, would create a character whose camp quotient easily rivals that of Mr. Humphries. However, his intention was to produce an ensemble piece similar to *Dad's Army* and that he did.

Since *TTBL*, Atkinson has been taking it a bit easy, except for a recent Comic Relief appearance and the filming of the short *Blackadder* film to be shown in the Millennium Dome.

Will The Real Rowan Atkinson Please Stand Up?

So, who is Rowan Atkinson and what he is really like? Is he the nerdish yet endearing Mr. *Bean* or the sardonic, sharp-tongued Edmund *Blackadder*? Will the real Rowan Atkinson please stand up?

No, probably not. Like his idol Peter Sellers, he chooses to hide behind his characters and remains an intensely private person. He is married to a former make-up artist named Sunetra (Stephen Fry was best man at their 1990 wedding) and the father of two children named Lily and Ben. He has a passion for cars, which he shared in a program called *The Driven Man*. Not much else is known.

However, he cannot be as much of a heartless monster as some of his characters. He has never hesitated to appear in the aid of important charities and this past March he once again did his bit for Comic Relief, playing Doctor Who in a running parody of the popular sci-fi series.

With so much already behind him, it's difficult to believe that Atkinson is only 44. It is rare that a British performer is accepted in the United States, but Atkinson has proven the exception to the rule. Why? The reason is simple. His two greatest characters, *Blackadder* and *Bean*, show that his unique combination of verbal and physical skills make Rowan Atkinson the consummate comic performer.



during the episode when the Buckets get new furniture. Hyacinth is desperate to make them jealous and does everything she can to make sure they see the delivery van, which has the royal warrant decal on both sides.

What avenue do they live on?

The happy couple lives on Blossom Avenue.

Where does Richard work?

Until his retirement, Richard was a "power in Local Authority Circles" a.k.a. a senior manager within the Finance and General Services department of the Local Authority.

What is "The Memoirs of Hyacinth Bucket?"

A compendium of **KUA** clips shown on PBS in 1997, but never screened in Britain. The clips are linked by Judy Cornwell and Geoffrey Hughes, in character as Daisy and Onslow. They have somehow come across Hyacinth's "memoirs," which lead into clips of her most memorable moments. It is available on video at stores like Borders or from on-line sources such as amazon.com.

What is Hyacinth's Bucket's Book of Etiquette for the Socially Less Fortunate?

The introduction sums it up well when it calls this book "the definitive work on modern social behaviour." This tie-in (written by Jonathan Rice) is the ultimate guide to good manners from the lady herself.

Chapters include Etiquette in the Home, Family, Relations and Friends, The Perfect Hostess, Social Obligations and A Healthy Mind in a Healthy Body.

Originally written with "a gold-nibbed fountain-pen containing a blue-black ink by appointment to Her Majesty," this important volume was put into type (I'm sure, of only the highest standards) and published by BBC Books in 1993, with a paperback version released the following year.

Why did Richard marry Hyacinth in the first place?

Clive Swift stated in an interview that Patricia Routledge thought Richard might've been orphaned, leaving him in need of a strong, motherly figure to look after him. However, he himself thought of Richard as a bit of a "lazy sod, really. His penance was that he had to put up with her personality." In the end, though, he figures that Richard and Hyacinth stay together because they're a bit like Tom and Jerry - 'it's a joke,' he said.

Hyacinth herself describes the marriage as "the perfect partnership of organizational skills, social connections and good looks, combined with Richard's willingness to learn."

What do the letters FH on Onslow's hat stand for?

The hat was a present to Geoffrey Hughes from Fulton Hogan Ltd., a New Zealand asphalt and roadbuilding company.

Which KUA actors were guest stars on Doctor Who?

Clive Swift, Geoffrey Hughes, Jeremy Gittins (the Vicar) David Griffin (Emmet) and Judy Cornwell all appeared in episodes of the popular sci-fi series.

Why did KUA cease production?

Mainly due to Patricia Routledge's desire to concentrate on *Hetty Wainthrop Investigates*, in which she plays a housewife/detective. *Hetty* lasted for five series and has been seen on PBS as part of the *Mystery!* series.

What's the cast been up to lately?

Patricia Routledge is currently playing Lady Bracknell in *The Importance of Being Earnest* at the Haymarket Theatre in London's West End.

Clive Swift recently portrayed King George II in a mini-series called *Aristocrats*.

Geoffrey Hughes appeared as "Twiggy" in the 1998 sitcom *The Royle Family*, which, despite its name, is about a very unpleasant family.

The first member of the *KUA* "family" to pass on was Mary Millar (Rose), who succumbed to cancer in November of 1998.

Millar was born in Doncaster on July 26, 1936. She not only found stardom on television, but was also a highly respected stage actress. She was the original Madame Giry in the London production of *Phantom of the Opera* and was appearing on stage as Mrs. Potts in Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* until her illness forced her to quit.

A video called **Entertaining the Hyacinth Way** is being released on August 17th. It contains three classic episodes: *Riparian Entertainments*, *Half a Camel* and *Indoor/Outdoor Luxury Barbeque and Finger Buffet*. Other episodes are also available on home video.



(Reggie Perrin - cont'd. from p. 11)

Other appointments: Doc Morrissey as Head of Forward Planning, Tom as Head of Publicity, and Jimmy as Head of Creative Thinking, each of whom demonstrates surprising genius at his position. Grot's profits soar to new heights. Reggie is forced to use even more desperate measures to destroy his creation.

Series Three: 7 episodes, based on "The Better World of Reginald Perrin."

One October morning in room 2 at the George Hotel in Netherton St. Ambrose, Dorset, Arthur Isambard Gossamer awakes beside his wife Jennifer. They used to be known as Mr. and Mrs. Reginald Iolanthe Perrin, until Reggie grew weary of success. So he faked another suicide, ditching his clothes and his old identity on the Dorset coast, this time accompanied by his wife and 40 admiring Reggie wannabes.

When caught in the middle of an ugly argument at a post office, Arthur/Reggie has another brainstorm. "I intend to set up a community," he tells Jennifer/Elizabeth, "where middle-aged, middle-class people like us can learn to live in love and faith and trust."

"I think that's a marvelous idea," says Elizabeth.

And so *Perrin's* is born, in Oslo Avenue, Botchley. Like Grot, it starts slowly, then catches fire with the public. As with Grot, Reggie hires his old cronies to help run the place: Doc as the Resident Psychologist ("Isn't there anything else I could do?"), Tom ("I'm not a sport person") in charge of Sports, Joan responsible for Music ("But you're tone deaf!" says Tony), and David Harris-Jones as director of Sex. There is one new quasi-crony, a snarling Scottish chef named Kenny McBlane.

REGGIE: *McBlane, the duchesse potatoes yesterday were superb.*
(McBlane swivels round slowly from the stove, and looks Reggie straight in the face.)

REGGIE: *But - I wouldn' want you to think that my praise of the potatoes implied any criticism of the choucroute a la hongroise.*
MCBLANE: *Flecking ma bloots wi' hae flaggis.*

REGGIE: *Sorry. Not... er... not quite with you.*
MCBLANE: *Ee goon awfa' muckle frae gang doon ee puir wee scrogglers ye thwink.*
REGGIE: *Ah. Jolly good. Carry on.*

A few months later, at the peak of its popularity, Perrin's is torn apart by forces within and without. This time, Reggie disbands his enterprise quickly and openly, bidding farewell to his colleagues.

He and Elizabeth sell the properties and buy a three-bedroom semi-detached villa in Goffley. He takes a job with Amalgamated Aerosols, in the Air Freshener and Deodorant division. He walks down Leibnitz Drive, turns right into Bertrand Russell Rise, then left into Schopenhauer Grove. His train arrives at Victoria Station twenty-three minutes late. He arrives at his new office in Aerosol House and meets his new boss.

His name is C.J.

Reggie returns to his new office and says calmly to his new secretary: "Find out the times of trains to the Dorset coast, would you?"

**THE FALL AND RISE OF
REGINALD PERRIN
CAST OF CHARACTERS**

Reginald Iolanthe Perrin - Leonard Rossiter
Elizabeth, his wife - Pauline Yates
Mark Perrin, their son - David Warwick
Linda, their daughter - Sally-Jane Spencer
Tom, Linda's husband - Tim Preece
Jimmy, Elizabeth's brother - Geoffrey Palmer
C.J., Reggie's boss at Sunshine Desserts - John Barron
Joan Greengross, Reggie's secretary - Sue Nicholls

Tony Webster, a Sunshine salesman - Trevor Adams
David Harris-Jones, a Sunshine salesman - Bruce Bould
Doc Morrissey, the company physician - John Horsley
Seamus Finnegan - Derry Power

LEONARD ROSSITER

The man who would be Rigsby and Reggie was born in Liverpool on October 21, 1926. He was unable to afford a university education so ended up working in an insurance office before being bitten by the acting bug. His experience started offstage, however, with his tenure as an assistant stage manager of a repertory company in the northern town of Preston. He eventually moved to London and began working in the theatre during the late 50s.

Rossiter worked with some of the best in his long and distinguished career. Stanley Kubrick directed him in 2001: A Space Odyssey and again in Barry Lyndon. He co-starred with Malcolm McDowell as a stressed out hospital administrator in Lindsay Anderson's satirical Britannia Hospital.

Other notable credits include playing Mr. Sowerberry in Oliver!, which won the Academy Award for Best Picture, and appearances alongside Peter Sellers in two of the Pink Panther movies.

His impish grin and twinkling eyes made Rossiter a natural for comedy, and even in supporting roles he was always able to stand out. His humor was always accompanied by a great deal of humanity and intelligence, giving him a depth and range rare among comedy performers.

His career began in the theatre and sadly, ended there as well. On October 5, 1984, he was performing in Joe Orton's play Loot at the Lyric Theatre and when he failed to show up for his cue was found dead of a heart attack in his dressing room. British theater, movies and television sadly lost a performer who was truly one of a kind.

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