



# The Drink Tank

DEUCE DUECE RAY-RAY



**The Following Article is somewhere between tongue in cheek and deadpan serious. I'm not 100% sure which. But, no matter what the intent, it does have a memorable title...**

## ***Screw Britannia: Modern British Short Films***

□ Britain is one of those smart countries that, unlike America, respects short form film and filmmakers. Every year, hundreds of films are made by Brits, many of them using public funds or working for one of the major television stations like Channel Four. In the last few years, a not terribly obvious theme has approached the surface for those of us who are always digging at the seemingly simple. Post-Thatcher Britain has brought huge challenges and has shone a bright spotlight on many of the problems that were left over from those golden years, though much of that lies hidden under layers that obscure the vision from the eyes of all but we brave film commentators. Even when a filmmaker is doing a simple little piece about a Traffic Warden, there's a rich undercurrent that seems to hint at the trouble in Britain.

□ In the years since Margaret Thatcher left 10 Downing Street, Britain has had to deal with problems of the homeland, since they no longer had the Cold War to encourage America to win. Thatcherism led to a great disparity in the classes, increasing racial tension and a strange relationship to the US. At the same time, Britain has lost its voice, being far less influential than in the days when Mags ran things. The entry into European Union has been sited by many as a sign of the UK losing its identity, though they have managed to keep the Euro away. Tony Blair's devolution and greater autonomy granted to the Scots, Welsh, and Northern Irish as well as the phasing out of hereditary seats in the House of Lords has made England itself seem far less regal than it had less than twenty years ago. While the days since Thatcher's 1990 departure have been dark for the isles, they have been bright for British film. With feature film directors like Guy Ritchie coming forth, international interest in Brit flicks has never been higher, leading more English films making their way into festivals and DVD releases around the world. Perhaps it is the sense of lost significance for the Mother Country that has brought out interesting visions from the artist caste.

□ Of the hundreds of British filmmakers, several come to mind as being of serious interest. The brilliantly twisted, and nominally Scottish, Simon Ellis has been doing mind-bending shorts since the turn of the century. Much of Simon's body of work has been done for Channel Four, and several of those pieces have found very receptive audiences on the US and European festival circuit. Some of his films, such as 2002's *10 Again*, are a take on the lives of people and the ways in which they attempt to obfuscate their true selves. In *10 Again*, a young girl tries to dress herself up to win the heart of an older boy. In Ellis's 2003 film *Telling Lies*, we are shown the true text meaning of the tales and half-truths uttered during a string of phone conversations the night after a series of infidelities. These certainly speak to one of the current strings that are haunting British Royalty. The armour that had once served so well in hiding the weaknesses of the tiny island has begun to rust and show the reality that lives underneath. Situations that would have been covered up in the thousand years prior, such as the dissolution of the Charles-Diane Incorporation and the expenses of the Monarchy, have come brightly into view due to the invention of mass media. These chinks in the armour would have been dealt with most harshly in previous generations, as many of the early reporters saw severe financial penalties or were simply bumped off. *Telling Lies* shows the truth behind the words, throwing light on the reality through to an eager and receptive audience, something that olde Britain did not have to worry about.

□ Ellis' short film *Bass Invaders*, more directly shows the power of mass communication to destroy and forever alter the English landscape. In this music video, a woofer speaker flies into a



# The Drink Tank



DEUCE DUECE RAY-RAY

small British hamlet, destroying cars and blowin' up skulls with the throbbing electronic bass groove. A pair of bickering agents are sent with ray-guns to stop it, which they manage to do with the help of several extra guns in the hands of the residents. They have a short-lived victory only to face a much greater attack. It's very perceivable that this is speaking more to the effect that non-BBC radio and American-infused music has had in bringing an end to the tradition of small village British living. While one could argue that this has been commented on since the 1950s, the rise of more and more non-government controlled outlets for introduction of London, and increasingly Los Angeles, thought into the small village consciousness should shoulder a certain amount of blame that can also be placed on modern radio programmers and policy makers.

Director Carol Morley is another of the modern generation of British filmmakers whose work seems to be about the general world around us but actually comments indirectly on the state of the British world view. Morley's 2001 film *Everyday Something* is a look at the events mentioned in the inner pages of British papers. The events re-enacted include a man who made his wife run several miles everyday while he rode after and berated her from his car, a woman who is forever rearranging the family's furniture, and a pair of men who unknowingly exchange owl calls every night.

□ Perhaps the segment of the film that most demonstrates the current British situation is the one where a deranged young man forces his parents to answer questions about Claudia Schiffer. It is this obsession with celebrity that is becoming more and more plain in the modern Britain. In previous generations, the most admired people tended to be either prime ministers, with Churchill appearing on the most admired list for more than a decade after his death, and sporters. In recent years, the lists have had folks like Robbie Williams reigning higher than the Prime Minister.

□ Morley's 2005 film *Stalin My Neighbor* features even more obvious parallels to Britain's plight. The story is of a young woman and the film crew that has come to document her troubles as she walks around White Chapel hanging up posters in the search for her lost cat. She suffers from depersonalization from having abandoned her sister in a field leading to her death. The crew seems to have gained interest in her once the bones of her sister were discovered. She ends up evading their questions by touring them around her part of London and giving them lessons on local history. The documentarian keeps trying to get her on track, but she goes back to her tales of Stalin, Ghandi, the Elephant Man and Jack the Ripper. The plight of Britain in recent



years has shown that they are far more interested in their past success and joys than they are in going into the realities of the recent past that are making life almost unlivable for a sizable portion of their population. There is a strong undercurrent in the view of the world that Britain is still huffing the few lingering fumes from their years as Empire. The most powerful Brits seem to support this view by constantly reminding us of their past good deeds anytime they arrive on the World Stage.

□ Also dealing with the concept of not moving forward is the Sean Ellis film *Cashback*. The film stars Sean Biggerstaff, best known as Oliver Wood from the Harry



# The Drink Tank



DEUCE DUECE RAY-RAY



Sean Biggerstaff in Cashback

Potter movies. The short deals with the ways in which the employees of a British supermarket survive through the eight hour over-night shift. One character, a young lady who is constantly hit upon by her manager, conceives to cover every possible location where she could get an idea of time, allowing her to pretend that as much or as little time has passed as she pleases. Many accuse the British people of doing the exact same thing in an effort to make themselves feel stronger. They can live in an isolated world where the prosperous reigns are still alive and things everywhere are still free and easy. Biggerstaff's character finds another method, by freezing time so that he can experience it his own way...mostly by undressing woman. The concept of living in a moment and never moving forward is the greatest complaint made by the intelligencia against the British Crown. Morrissey's 2004 song "Irish Blood, English Heart" makes the claim against the Monarchy as well. While The Crown seems an anachronism, the Queen and the Titled mass still act as if they are the Rulers of the World, though they have had their actual powers nearly completely wiped from the board.

□ Duane Hopkins is a gritty filmmaker whose work has chronicled British youth in their most destructive frames. Hopkins' brilliant short *The Field* is about a roving pack of teens bored with the simple life they lead in suburban England. This group of teens wrecks terrible havoc on a farmers field and an innocent sheep. The story has hints of the belief that many Brits, and even more ex-pats, hold towards us brutish Americans. They believe that we are stirring up trouble due to a collective boredom brought about by no longer having Uncle Ivan to kick around. America, often running in a small pack with Britain and a few other lesser followers, is constantly throwing up dust and destroying simple things around the world for no good reason. When the Iraq War concept began to rear its head, the idea was even more pronounced, setting tongues wagging at pubs both on the Island and across the States.

The 2003 film *Love Me or Leave Me Alone* shows a strained relationship between a pair of teenagers. The main thrust of the story seems to ask the question should I stay or should I go...and will you let me. The relationship between these two is highly troubled, as they go about breaking up or making up before finally agreeing that neither really know what they want or what to do next. This is exactly the relationship between Britain and the US since the departure of Maggie T. in the early

1990s. America has spit in the face of Britain several times, just as the young male in the film does to his girlfriend in the opening shot. Between house resolutions that have damaged UK business interests to what some referred to as strong-arming the Brits into joining with us in Iraq and Afghanistan, there has been no limit to the strains that the US has put on our former owners. At the same time, the British keep opening themselves up by offering assistance, by agreeing to strange and sometimes self-defeating terms, and by constantly declaring that we are their closest allies while at the same time maintaining that they are always looking out for their best interests and that all the agreement with America is just a grand coincidence. In the short, the young lady allows her boyfriend(?) to make love to her even though in the end she refuses to confirm whether or not they are still a couple. This directly reflects the British attitude towards the US, where they are willing to let themselves be fucked, but will always leave us, and themselves, guessing.



Still from Love Me or Leave Me Alone



# The Drink Tank

DEUCE DUECE RAY-RAY



Not all short films receive government funding or major TV station monies and those poor sods have to deal with finding funding the same way that American producers go about it: by selling sperm. The producers of No Deposit, No Return did just that to pay for their short about a woman robbing a sperm bank in a fit of post-modern humor. The woman robber in the film is desperate to get her hands on some of the top-notch sperm without the hassles of interviews and fighting the thought that single women in their 30s are not fit to be mummies. She would be able to get it if it weren't for the intrepid night watchman. She makes a hostage out of him, though the two of them end up having a bit of fun. The view held by many English institutions is that older single women aren't fit to be mothers, and this has caused women to either be turned away or presented with enough hassles to drive them off. The view towards single mothers in Britain is far lower than the same in the US.

Another film dealing with single motherhood and its difficulties that has received a lot of attention in the last year or so is *Wasp*. Andrea Arnold's short is magnificently constructed: a young mother of four happens across a former bloke she once fancied. He asks her out for a pint and she accepts, denying that the kids she is walking with are hers. She can't get a babysitter, so she brings them with her to the pub, forcing them to stand outside while she works her magic on her could-be boyfriend. The kids get into all sorts of trouble, including eating left over fish and chips from a garbage can. This is easily a tale of what's wrong with the council housing system, but there's more. The story seems to say a great deal about the way the British look at their problems. Many of the poor and young see a Britain that does just this to all its weakest subjects. The conditions that the Government is willing to accept for its subjects are much the same as those the mother in Arnold's short. More and more people, particularly young mothers, are entering the system and finding some assistance, but little in the way of actual help. There is a sense of desertion, that once they are given housing and a place on the dole, that there is no uplift or follow-up. This leads to great increases in crime as these people find that though the bigger need is taken care of, that they still most fight through the ever-inflating lesser ones on their own.

Perhaps the most telling short to me is a referential film called *Blake's Junction 7*. The short deals with the folks from the television series *Blake's Seven* dealing with no longer having Blake around. Driving a car pulling a trailer, they stop at a service station along the M1 for dinner and gas before heading off. The short shows the crew doing little more than buying food, playing video games and using the restroom. These are completely mundane activities in our completely mundane world. The characters are all dressed in their uniforms and one is the computer in a plexy box from the show and seem to have an average time. The short strips much of the science fiction aspect and shows an everyday set of interactions quite removed from the former magic. This is precisely the view of how a growing number of British subjects, and much of the exterior world, look at the history, ancient through to contemporary, of their storied isles and where it has taken them. What was once a grand mystic world, where great warriors like William the Bastard once reigned, is now completely run by men with no fire in the souls. Where once noble thinkers and actors such as Alfred the Great and Edward the Confessor ruled, there is now but group think and the mass media-fueled herd mentality. Much blame can go to television made in the US, though certainly not all. Many



Top: *The Wow and Girls of the Oscar-winning Short Film Wasp*.

Left: *Wasp* director Andrea Arnold after her Oscar win. *Wasp* so impressed director Lars Von Trier that he gave a million bucks to Arnold for her first feature film. It is also being shown to many of the Brits by the Housing Councils.



# The Drink Tank

DEUCE DUECE RAY-RAY



commentators point out that every day Britain becomes more and more like the US; completely devoid of any of the majesty that once marked the isles. Hell, there have been songs about that very topic. One by the previously mentioned Morrissey off of his *Your Arsenal* album comes to mind first.

□ The demystification of science as to being a ho-hum part of the everyday world is also apparent in *Blake's Junction 7*, as is the attitude of Brits towards technology. In the 1970s, there were a great many British cautionary tales telling us that the rise of computers would harm every man and make the UK unrecognisable. Here, we see the science-y future thrown about all over the place and no one seems to care. Quite a change.

□ The power of British filmmaking in the new century comes from its attention to every detail in the world they are trying to present. This magnifying glass should certainly bring the general state of Britain towards the surface, though still remaining happily underground where only those of us with enough time and patience can truly find what was hiding the deep vaults of the writers and directors of these pieces of cinema.

## *12 pt Courier New by Jay Crasdan*

When Chris first showed me *Screw Britannia*, I thought he was playing a rib on me. I mean, no one, no sensible person who knew anything about film and politics could possibly believe any of those things. He had to be joking. As I read it again, I realized that not only wasn't he joking (and don't think for a minute we buy that 'tongue-in-cheek' concept!) and that he really believed that all of British post-Cold War society was contained in the frames of a few British Short Films.

Honestly, having lived in the UK briefly in the early 1990s, I can say that there were a lot of themes in the works you saw all over the place, but none of them were as imagined as those that Chris has cooked up. A science fiction show coming to the real world showing the death of English Majesty? I thought that the coverage of Di and Chuck's Divorce did that fully. OK, I'll give him WASP, but his take on *Love Me or Leave Me Alone* might be a bigger stretch than an Oprah collection of Spandex leotards.

So, in summary, Chris is a Jackass, but I think we all knew that.

## A Few Words About Eating

I love Vietnamese Food. There, I've said and I feel better about myself and my dining habits for it. I can't help myself, there is just something in Pho or Bun plates that just drags me towards it. It might be the Star Anise, which I've been told is not actually anise, or perhaps it's the fried rolls. It's so hard to say, but I've found myself at a little Pho place in Sunnyvale several times over the last couple of weeks. The Chicken Rice plates tend to be my favourite, as it's pretty basic. I've left Pho itself behind a bit, as too much hot soup makes me grumpy late in the day, but man, I like rice and noodle plates.

The Drink Tank issue 22 was written by Jay Crasdan and Christopher J. Garcia, then Edited by Christopher J. Garcia with some friendly assistant from the newly-repatriated M Lloyd. All comments are welcome so you can send them to [garcia@computerhistory.org](mailto:garcia@computerhistory.org) or to 1401 N. Shoreline Blvd, Mountain View, CA 94043. I want to say thanks to Jan Stinson for some nice advice on Claims Department and announce that Issue 3 will be out shortly, probably in your hands (if you are one of the 25 who get it) by Memorial Day. M is also planning on doing a "Hyperactive Typist" anthology of my work for the end of the year. Yay!



# The Drink Tank

DEUCE-DEUCE RAY-RAY



## **Herman: The Legal Labrador**

Australia is the home of Bruce Gillespie, Footy, Gary Ablett and Gary Ablett Jr., Nathan Jones, and Peter Garrett, all of which I've written about at one point or another. It is also the home of David Blumenstein, a great animator. His 2004 short comedy Herman: The Legal Labrador is one of the greatest grown-up comedy cartoons of all-time.

Herman is a dog, a cute Labrador who barks and runs around and solves mysteries. He also managed to pass whatever the Aussie version of the Bar is and he's an active lawyer. For some reason, he also wears pants. His owner is a guy whose life hasn't been great of late, as he was dumped and lost his job. Luckily, Herman has no problem helping him out with rent when he needs it.

Blumenstein does a great job with the animation, sticking with traditional work instead of CGI or a more anime style. His characters are heavy-lined and clean, while he does some photo manipulated backgrounds, which adds a nice touch of texture to the entire piece.

But enough about that. Herman busts up a meeting of all the most evil people in the world.

## **Dad Update**

Alive and with slightly less innards. His first rounds of chemo went mildly well. No signs of hair loss at all, which isn't surprising as he kept all his hair last time too. His spirits are high, as is his nausea factor. He's been reading a lot and still has managed to do all of his volunteer work. He's figuring he'll make it another few years, and has been very open about it. His big goal is to make it to fifty (that's this August), though both me and Bailey (my half-sis) would very much rather he be around until he's a Grandfather. I'd like to thank Jan Stinson, Dave Burton, M Lloyd, Marin Carpenter, Joker and Lloyd Penney for the kind words. Pops is currently enjoying reading el and the issues of Banana Wings I lent him.

. Invitees include The KKK, The Waste Management Unions, Telemarketers and The Moth People. They are hilarious and as Herman goes to fight them, he makes me laugh. The final court battle is also hilarious and manages to present a pelican as an evil-doer better than any other film or cartoon I've ever seen. That and there's a gag about pizza chefs that just kilt me.

You might get a chance to see it on the festival circuit, though I've heard that various DVD collections are interested in adding it to their ranks. I would say that this was adult funny without being overly dirty, which is the usual trouble with these cartoons. Great short cartoon.

## **Wow! New(ish) Software!!!**

So, I've complained before about the fact that I use Adobe Illustrator to lay out each issue of Claims Department. It's a pain, but it's just about the only programme I have that is intuitive for me and gives me all teh options I'd like. I've tried Word and OpenOffice, neither of whcih really worked for me. Katheryn Daugherty introduced me to inDesign, which instantly hooked me and forced me to look deep within myself to find a way to get a copy. It has the feature that would help me more than any other: Linking Text so that you can send text from one text box to another without having to jigger with things. Illustrator doesn't have that feature.

What does this mean to you, my gentle readers? Well, the design of The Drink Tank will probably change, perhaps drastically. The design for Claims Department won't change much, but the dropped words and the inconsistant text will change since I can do a universal fix where previously if I made a big ole mistake, it couldn't be changed without starting all over again. So, inDesign will hopefully make it easier for y'all to see 35% more flaws in my writing and not be able to blame them on my poor layout skills!



# The Drink Tank



ISSUE NUMBER FIFTEEN (AND I LIKE IT TOO)

The Bloke from Etoicoke, Lloyd Penney writes in:

Dear Chris:

□ Man, you are prolific. I just can't keep up! I'm off on a sick day from work, but I can't stay in bed all day. So (cough, cough), here's a loc on issues 16 through 21 of The Drink Tank.

***I've learned to live without sleep and blinking only once per hour. Really opens up my day. Oddly, when I am home sick (or even when I'm home actually sick) I never seem to get anything done. FANAC is a work thing for me. Fast connection and all that.***

16...Voting for fan funds isn't in the budget any more, so I didn't vote for either TAFF or DUFF. CUFF is looking for candidates, but I've done that, and can't really do it again. Good to know that at least some fan funds are healthy, and there's lots of people willing to take a shot at it.

***I hear that FFANZ is having a similar trouble.***

Okay, you got my loc on Claims Department 1, and just yesterday, issue 2 arrived. A loc is coming on that asap. I haven't read much alternate history because so much of it is military SF, which I just can't read. That Harrison book is on the shelf, read long ago, and it is deserving of a re-read, if I ever had the time for re-reads...

***And thanks for the LoCs. Here's a stat that might interest you: every person who LoCs represents 4% of the total readership!***

There are many fandoms, science fiction being just one of them, and the term SF fandom itself covering many fandoms. I've tried to sample from those that pique my interest; fanzine fandom was not my first fannish endeavour, but it's the one that seems to stay with me more than the others. Didn't know the Barenaked Ladies had their own fandom; bet they'd be surprised.

***The First Fandom that I wasn't born into was Twin Peaks fandom. That was the one that really tuned me into other fans from around the world. I was reading TP zines and going to special showings. I do know some hard core BNL fans though.***

17...Haven't seen Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy yet, and with the costs of movies these days, I probably won't. But, with the last Star Wars movie coming out in a few days, we'll go to that.

There is a local SW fandom that is almost totally online, and they will be in the first lineup. The reviews I've heard are mostly positive, and the positive ones are mostly gushing with awe. These movies have always been fun eye candy, and I expect nothing more with Episode III.

***What I've seen of Episode III, I'm not too excited, but it's a scene I must be a part of.***

There a loc from me on issue 16 in this issue...oh, well, more comments are good, if not repetitious. I am not sure about supporting the Montreal in 2009 bid; there are many misgivings about Rene's and Terry's experience with Worldcons, but I do wish them well. Who knows, once the distant Worldcons are done, Interaction and Nippon 2007, and Wcons come back to central North America, perhaps our interest will pick up again. Maybe I'll be working steady by then, hm?

***I hope you will be on a steady work vibe by that point. I've heard others say the same thing, that these guys aren't able to put on a full-fledged WorldCon, but I also talked to Rene and the impression I got was that he would be the Bid Chair but not the Con chair. That sorta thinking reminds me a little of the Con Jose, but still, they put on a good con.***

18...The very first music video I ever saw on television was Hyperactive by Thomas Dolby. One victim of the She Blinded Me With Science video was Prof. Magnus Pyke, who was the apparently mad scientist who'd cry out "Science!" from time to time. He was a busy scientist in Britain, and also a television host, but taking part in the Dolby video blew his reputation out of the water. I'm not even sure if he's still alive.

***That is a sad way to lose your position in the world.***



# The Drink Tank

ISSUE NUMBER FIFTEEN (AND I LIKE IT TOO)



In fandom's early days, it would be quite possible to have read everything (literally) in science fiction, and the common experience of having read the same books brought forth great discussions in a scholarly vein. Now, there's so many books, magazines, etc., finding someone who's read the same books you have is a minor miracle. And, of those books you and Matt Appleton have listed, they may be among the masterpieces of the genre, written by its masters, but many of them are out of print, available only through some good fortune at a used book shop.

***You know, I never thought of that. The ability to be a completist no longer exists in science fiction. You can still be a SteamPunk completist, and it's barely possible to be a CyberPunk completist, but otherwise, it's nearly impossible. I guess the explosions of the 50s, 60s, 80s, and 90s may have had their downsides.***

19...The only amusement park that is close to me is Paramount Canada's Wonderland, to the northeast. It's been going for close to 20 years now, and I've never been to it. Amusement parks hold no appeal for me at all. There's also the annual Canadian National Exhibition west of downtown, and there's theme parks in the Niagara Falls area, but I haven't been to the CNE in many years.

***Amusement Park fans are born. We're a weird bunch, often loving thrills on coasters and being the most life-terrified people there are when we're not strapped in. OK, I'm not one of them, though I am more cautious than I appear. I haven't been to the CNE in ages. I can barely remember it.***

20...The Canadian postal system is quite organized, and I live with an expert on the subject. Yvonne used to work for Canada Post, and she helped to set up the system years ago. My postal code is M6C 2B2, the M meaning Toronto, and the 6 and C dividing up the region into postal districts. The 2B2 is assigned to the area of Eva Rd. I live on. English coding has mystified me, too, but I'm sure there's a system involved in it. I sure hope so, anyway...

***If any British reader can send me a detailed description of what goes on what line in a letter to a British address, I'll buy them the dinner of their choice the next time they are within 100 miles of wherever I'm at.***

Sympathies on your dad...let's hope the chemo gets that cancer for good this time.

***Thanks. He's in good spirits, though the odds of him making it to be an old man have decreased largely. He's makign up for it by being crotchety and funnier than usual. He's also taken to calling me sonny, whihc is kinda weird.***

A quick fanzine sounds like fun...Geri Sullivan did something like that at the last ConFusion in the Detroit area, but we weren't there to see it. I hope I can at some future date, like at the next Corflu, perhaps? Still no word on it, but I'll keep an eye out.

***If there would be one place where you could get a great fanzine in about an hour, it would be CorFlu. Might be fun. I'm 100% for CorFlu now. I mentioned that I was planning***

21...So, the Hitchhiker's movie was made for an American audience, hm? I've read one scathing British review that said it had been Americanized for the large audience. I'd like to compare the American and British reviews, or even see a British cut of the movie. British fans poke fun at American fans as being slightly humour-impaired; maybe this movie will also show up some of the differences.

***I could see why the Brits would hate this version, but it's a fun little film.***

And once again, I am caught up. Take care, and I'm sure issue 22 will show up...within minutes, hm? See you then.

***I'll try and get 8 more issues out by the time you're reading to read another!***

Yours, Lloyd Penney.