

Coming up next
Jon Holmes



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A compilation of TV shows that has somehow fallen through a wormhole in space, and Jon is reviewing them - look out for *Wife Swapping with Dinosaurs* and *How Clean is Gordon Ramsey's Mouth?*

Jon Holmes | Writer, comedian and presenter

I'm not a TV reviewer, but I regularly bet on them for sport. Each Thursday in a pub in the East End we dedicated few gather to watch TV critics fight each other to a pulpy mess. It's like pit-bull fighting but more humane because no one cares how much they get hurt. I tell you, if you haven't seen the *People's* Gary Bushell wading into the *Sunday Mirror's* Ian Hyland with his hairy fists, AA Gill busting the face of Ally Ross or the *Radio Times's* Alison Graham taking a good kicking in her balls, then you haven't lived. It's a dirty, illegal, underground spectacle of heck, but it's the only language they understand. Apart from Nancy Banks-Smith, who also speaks, and fights, like a Klingon.

It was at one such event when the drink and the bile were flowing, that someone, it may have been me, suggested a no-holds-barred 'all critics in' fight to the death. Within seconds this dimly lit cellar was bloodier than a Mary and then, as suddenly as it began, it was over. I lingered among the corpses, long after the crowd had dispersed, and it was while I was going through Boyd Hilton's dead pockets that I came across a review tape.

It was no ordinary review tape. It was from the future. It was a compilation of TV shows from 2014 that had somehow fallen through a wormhole in space. As I turned it over in my hands I saw Boyd was trying to speak. With his last breath he told me the tape had come back in time to warn us of what lies ahead, like a sort of review tape ghost of television future. He bade me watch it and pass its important message on, begging me to do what I could to try and change the path of all our screen futures. 'Imagine a world', he whispered through bubbly lips, 'where *Bo Selecta!* is still being commissioned.' I shuddered, wiped the tape down and took it home.

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If you have any say over what is on television then please, heed this warning. As for me, I was about to travel right into the heart of darkness. I was going to the worst place in the world, and I didn't even know it yet.

Home. I slid the tape into the machine and pressed play, fully expecting it to kill me, like out of the film *The Ring*. There was crackle. Static.

Distortion. A flash of red, a shout, then... nothing. I thought the tape had twisted like a bad spine. It hadn't, it simply turned out to be a new BBC ONE ident package. That balloon that we all liked? It's still not back, but at least the dancers have fucked off. It becomes clear that what I'm about to see is a montage of an evening's worth of viewing, sometime in 2014, across all the channels. Except BBC Three of course, which was axed in 2006.

The tape rolled. White noise. Then a picture plunged on. My first lesson was a harsh one. Following the abolition of the licence fee in 2010, it appears that the unique way in which the BBC is funded is now a Telethon. On my screen a bald Terry Wogan, a receding Gaby Roslin and Johnny and Denise Vaughn (married) were hosting an evening of newsreaders and celebrities. These 'newsrities' were dressed up and dancing like meat puppets to try to raise money for the BBC to make programmes. In nine hours they raise a total of two grand, which instantly gets chucked away on some sort of obscure online commercial venture. Viewers can now only watch BBC programmes by bidding for them individually on eBay.

'Screen roll. A big eye. Then *that* theme tune. I'm looking at *Big Brother 15*. Jumping, clapping shapes of screaming homosexual halfwits and fat trannies abound in yet another kaleidoscope of Endemol's idea of what human behaviour is like.'

More flicker. An ITV ident in which Des Lynam (he must have gone back) lurches across some yellow and blue. I relax. It's still reassuringly eggy. Then we're into a pilot of something called *Thomson and Venables' Saturday Night Takeaway*. It's tasteless and shocking in equal measure, but in a world where Abi Titmuss can become a 'personality' I guess anything is possible. It's a horrible, horrible mistake, but we all know televisual accidents happen very easily. I can see what's happened. It's the ill-conceived result of a commissioning editor shouting 'Ant and Dec are so 2004. Get me another cheeky, zany duo from the North and we'll make television!' Then, in a horrible echo of what happened to Thomas à Becket after King Henry got in a strop, a naïve producer took her at her word and went looking for two 'names'. It'll never be a series. Oh no, wait. It says FX on Sky have bought it for the autumn.

Screen roll. A big eye. Then *that* theme tune. I'm looking at *Big Brother 15*. Jumping, clapping shapes of screaming homosexual halfwits and fat trannies abound in yet another kaleidoscope of Endemol's idea of what

human behaviour is like. God knows what happened in the ten years between 2004 and 2014 but in the clip on the tape, a hermaphrodite was giving birth to a bi-curious immigrant in a den while an angry leopard stalked round the house. And the water in the Jacuzzi had been replaced by battery acid. I have to say it was excellent. Supremely watchable stuff as ever.

White noise. Then a big, bold title card: *Wife Swapping With Dinosaurs*. Now this was genius. It's the old RDF format of swearsy women in shellsuits crossed with the runaway success of that dinosaur thing that was once on BBC ONE. In the episode presented here, Carol, a swearsy woman in a shellsuit, is sent to live in a tropical jungle in the Late Cretaceous era while a seven-foot-high velociraptor is brought to a sink estate in Bromley to look after her kids. The kids smoke, the velociraptor doesn't. It's a recipe for disaster.

The T4 logo. Then another title card. It says *Les Dawson's Creek*. There's no footage and I have no idea what it is. But it sounds charming.

Black screen. Suddenly an orchestra. A mirror ball. Then - curtains. Through them come the brightly flashing eyes of Bruce. I realise the BBC are still churning out *Strictly Come Dancing*, even though Bruce died aged 140 in 2009. It was such a ratings-winner back in 2004 that Bruce's remains have been heaved out of his grave on a spade and thrust in front of a starcloth in TC1. He's been glued together in a rough approximation of that sort of shape that he does and ratings and share have gone colossal. His eyes are brightly flashing because the holes where they used to be are now tiny moving Vari-lights that blink in time to the orchestra. Nice to see him, to see him nice.

'Things flash by. Is that Barrymore? Surely not. It jars to a stop. I'm in the middle of something called *How Clean Is Gordon Ramsey's Mouth?* Gordon is saying 'fuck' while Kim and Aggie are dressed as nuns and squirting liquid soap into his mouth.'

Next clip. The tape was rattling through. It was something from Sky 'Two'. In late 2013, says the publicity blurb, this new channel pointlessly outbid its sister station, Sky One, for the rights to Season 14 of 24. It's the 14th worst day of Jack Bauer's life. His daughter has been kidnapped by the ghost of Nina Myers who is riding a giant cow round the streets of Los Angeles, shooting people with a space laser. It's also inexplicably hosted by Ant and Dec, who are now back in TV favour after the debacle that was the Thomson and Venables pilot.

The tape fast-forwards on picture search. I'm not doing it, it's like that on the recording. I can't stop it. Things flash by. Is that Barrymore? Surely not. It jars to a stop. I'm in the middle of something called *How Clean Is Gordon Ramsey's Mouth?* Gordon is saying 'fuck' while Kim and Aggie (who to be honest are looking old and tired) are dressed as nuns and squirting liquid soap into his mouth. Ann Aston tells me it's a 20-week series on Channel 4.

I've seen enough. I reach for the remote. Then I freeze. I'm watching *A Big Muppet 9/11*. For it's 14th anniversary, the 2001 terrorist attack on the Twin Towers is recreated by the Jim Henson Creature Workshop. I'm shocked, but then I realise it's 2014 and enough time has passed. It's actually really, really good, especially the songs. Animal is still the best muppet. Then, as the second furry plane hits, the tape stops. It's over.

I sit quietly and remember my promise to Boyd. I get up, switch on my computer and sit down to write this. Television: You Have Been Warned.