

ely film society

July 2017

the notes

coming up @ kings lynn

JULY

- Thursday 20th 7.30pm
THE CABINET OF DR CALIGARI
- Saturday 22nd 12pm
BALLETTYOYZ – YOUNG MEN
- Saturday 29th 12pm
DEAN SPANLEY

AUGUST

- SOCIAL EVENT: Thursday 10th 6pm
Pre-Film Meal at the Riverside
 - Thursday 10th 7.30pm
JACKIE
 - Thursday 24th 7.30pm
THE HANDMAIDEN
- <http://www.klccc.uk/films>

Four Lions

Chris Morris, UK 2010

Script by Chris Morris , Sam Bain, Jesse Armstrong and Simon Blackwell

Riz Ahmed Omar
 Arsher Ali Hassan
 Nigel Lindsay Barry
 Kayvan Novak Waj
 Adeel Akhtar Faisal
 Julia Davis Alice
 Craig Parkinson Matt
 Preeya Kalidas Sofia
 Wasim Zakir Ahmed
 Mohammad Aqil Mahmood
 Karl Seth Uncle Imran
 Waleed Elgadi Khalid
 Alex Macqueen...Malcolm Storge MP
 Shameem Ahmad Chairwoman
 Jonathan Maitland Newsreader
 Benedict Cumberbatch Negotiator

emerged: brisk, often foul-mouthed, relentlessly mocking and homing in hard on social and political issues. It is also intensely media-literate, playing hard with form – editing, camerawork and above all the verbal evasions and tropes of regular discourse. *The Thick Of It* went for spin doctors; *Twenty Twelve* guyed the Olympics, while *Peep Show* anatomised the small world of self-deluding single men and *Nathan Barley* homed in on hipster narcissism. Most relentless in attacking the pretensions of TV news were a pair of mockumentary shows: *The Day Today* (with its spinoff *I'm Alan Partridge*), and *Brass Eye* which famously hoaxed real politicians into pronouncing on

fictional topics, and an exquisitely creepy cult sketch show called *Jam*, which started as a late night “ambient experiment”, *Blue Jam*, on Radio 1.

These latter were the brainchildren of Chris Morris. Born in Colchester in 1962, he is either “the most loathed man in Britain” (Daily Mail) or possessed of “uncompromising, moralistic drive” (British Film Institute). Very probably he is proud of both. Over the years his work has advanced the careers of now-household-name actors such as Kevin Eldon, Steve Coogan and Julia Davis, and *Four Lions* sees a number of lingering favours being called in, most notably script assistance from Sam Bain and Jesse

- Bomb the mosque, radicalise the moderates, bring it all on.
 - Let's bomb Boots. They sell condoms that make you want to bang white girls.

Over the last twenty years, the British film industry has seen a steady rise in ambition and commercial success, but the real powerhouse and proving ground for writers, actors and directors has been in television series. A film is a nice bonus, but a series has reach and profile. Emboldened by the ground broken by HBO imports such as *The Sopranos*, a new style of drama has



Armstrong, creators of *Peep Show*, *The Thick Of It* and (since this film) the student-life drama *Fresh Meat*. And for seasoned satirists, what topic could better deserve attention than... terrorism.

Terrorism has usually been handled with grim seriousness onscreen: from *The Battle Of Algiers* [1965] via *Cal* [1984] to *United 93* [2006] the cause is seen as all-compelling even if judged as "wrong". The participants are doomed warriors, their flaws noble, the outcome no laughing matter. And yet terrorists are human, usually of humble origin and mostly men. What gets them into the situation where they can threaten life? And in the case of suicide bombers, their own life, with no expectation of seeing the greater outcome for which they struggle?

The "four lions" are simple men – much of the time, too simple. Oh, and they started as five. In urban Sheffield, Omar is a devoted family man working nights as a CCTV operator at a shopping mall; Barry – or Azzam al-Britani as he prefers to style himself for a public meeting – is a fat white Cockney with the deranged rhetoric that only a convert can bring to an established religion; Fessal is all excited indiscipline, while Hassan and Waj are dim bulbs of no fixed career

and wavering commitment. Bain and Armstrong's influence is apparent in the delineation of the messed-up manchild world in which they live; plastic toys, fast food, blaring pop music, battered cars and clueless coarse misogyny and racism that passes for bonding banter. When filming his jihadi video statement, Hassan raps *We are the martyrs/ you're just smashed tomatoes*. When Barry's car expires mid-street, it's the fault of the Jews. "Jews invented sparkplugs to control global traffic!" he roars with complete conviction. (A pity that no credit seems to have been given to the contributor of the subtitled Urdu dialogue, which has a spice all of its own). Props and mostly close handheld camerawork make the most of the film's modest budget by putting the action in your face: the total was a scant £2.5 million, and the impressive desert was in fact rural Spain.

But it's all going to be a lark. Martyrdom heaven doesn't have 76 virgins, it's an Alton Towers day out that never ends. "Rubber Dinghy Rapids!" Omar and Hassan yell at each other for motivation. But like all the best – or worst – gangs, internal strife seeps into the unity. After a "training camp" trip to desert Pakistan goes pitifully wrong, Omar has to lie about

his instructions from "the emir" to keep the mission on track, while Barry enjoys the power games for their own sake. We also find that Omar has his own issues with his brother, an ultra-conservative who can spout the Koran endlessly to prove his piety, but whose wetness is that of the rainy kickabout he leads in the park to keep away from the unclean influence of women. (A fun bit of bait and switch too when the armed police raid pounces on the wrong house and the wrong brother...)

The Lions worry endlessly about surveillance even though their blunders go mostly undetected. Morris's knowing use of technology – phones, camcorders, CCTV images – only serves to show four men whose problems are not the modern world or the will of Allah, but their own heads. (Morris has said that his template was *Dad's Army*, who luckily don't get to fight a war, however willing they are). And a pat ending is undermined at the end by tiny codas that recall *Jam's* way with non-sequiturs. Have fun working out what that Weetabix is doing in the final minutes. Or you might continue to fret about the serenity of Omar's wife and his trusting son. They know what he's going to do, and however ineptly, he does it.



This seems the perfect team, the man behind *Brass Eye* and the writers of *Peep Show* and *In the Loop* which look at the dark, claustrophobic workings of the male mind under pressure...

*The Universal Male! We've ousted Martin Amis! I went to the high court and watched the Bluewater terrorist trial and got to hear a lot of MI5 surveillance tapes of the suspects, and you start to realise these people are klutzing around in a very average way – like men at stag parties or five-a-side football. Everyone reporting on it knew it was like *The Keystone Cops*. There's a recording I heard where one guy says, "Hey bro, what's the date today?" And the other guy says it's the twenty-third. "So is tomorrow the twenty-fourth?" You wondered if they were stoned but the police said no.*

There's a bit where they're arguing about who's cooler, Bin Laden or Johnny Depp. You hear ridiculous things like, "My wife's really pissed off with you 'cos she made you these



sandwiches and you didn't eat them and then you ate a load of chocolate spread. Hey, wouldn't it be brilliant if we pulled an airliner out of the sky? Yeah bro, that'd be fantastic! What's on telly tonight? Ah that Richard Littlejohn, I don't like him. When's Jeremy Clarkson on, he's brilliant?"

You have to unload a lot of cultural and factual stuff to create a context for these – actually really normal – reactions between blokes. The one who wants to be leader, the thick one, the bullied type...

[...] ... they're a bunch of blokes but they're not just a bunch of blokes. You have to understand something that seems, paradoxically, not to fit into a universal experience until you look at it this way. I mean – call me sick – but I remember going to a test match once and thinking: I could take this one out! There's a guy going round with this wheelbarrow thing full of beer, so... It is quite fun, walking around London. You start working up bomb plots. We came up with ten great ones. Sadly if we'd been brown and the room had been bugged, we wouldn't be sitting here talking to you now.



Chris Morris interviewed by Mark Ellen, **Time Out**

**NEXT MONTH'S FILM IS
THE FIREMEN'S BALL**
(Miloš Forman,
Czechoslovakia 1967)
Monday 21 August

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