



SIOBHAN McNALLY

Guest TV columnist

It's a mad world for party girl Liz

Party hostess for people with the mostest, Liz Taylor, says the secret to her success is "thinking of the maddest thing possible", which, it turns out in that particular corner of the footballers' belt in Cheshire, is Liz herself.



THAT'S RICH
Hostess Liz Taylor

We watch as The Millionaire Party Planner (Channel 4), Manchester's answer to global brand momager Kris Jenner, rallies her troops and inspires her suppliers with brutal efficiency. Even going so far as to accuse a Jewish mother client who didn't like her emoji table plan idea of "p***** on my chips". Surely for some people, that's considered a delicacy.

Then there's the skinny, trophy wife client, whose rich husband is throwing her a lavish 40th bash, but complains the sushi canapes that cost £4 a throw were served in spoons "too big - they ruin your lipstick". Clearly she's only used to eating food off a toothpick.

But Liz is not without her charitable side, even insisting on £750 gold-dipped bouquets of roses for a Midas Touch-themed fundraising ball.

I guess "A fool and his money are soon parted" wouldn't sound quite so snappy.



» The top-of-the-range guests gracing Graham Norton's sofa made Alan Carr's New Year Specstacular line-up look a bit Poundshop by comparison. Luckily, Channel 4's Alan had spent the money he'd managed to save on props to electrocute his guests. Sadly it turned out that, unlike a potato, you can't use a Kelly Brook to create a spark.

» The eighth series of Take Me Out brings its own meaning to the butterfly chaos theory. Saturday night's contestant Milly claps her bum for Vulcan-eared Paddy McGuinness in an ITV studio and another little bit of human dignity crumbles into the ocean of light entertainment dross on the other side of the world. Too much?

Once more into the breeches...

JUST as well I'm rather partial to chaps in tight breeches, because there was an awful lot of them on my TV screen this New Year.

In fact, between the two new lavish costume dramas - War and Peace and Dickensian - the Beeb's wardrobe department must be all out of heaving bosoms and stiff upper lips.

No wonder Poldark has to get his 19th Century kit off. It's needed in another studio's period setting.

Just as well, then, that Sunday night's new BBC adaptation of Tolstoy's long-winded Russian epic has been slashed to six hour-long episodes, down from 1972's 20-parter.

At this rate, 2058's version will be a tweet: "#war&peace Napoleon invades Russia. Miffed posh families fight back. French run away. Russians celebrate. They all marry. Huzzah!"

Still, the story doesn't suffer for a bit of editing, but it does mean that if you nip out to put the kettle on, you'll miss 7,000 pages of plot from the original books.

But when the Beeb decides to do costume drama, by Gad, suh, it does it properly. There's gazillions of gorgeous young RADA-type totty like Lily James in lavish frocks getting off with darkly brooding soldiers in braided uniforms, supported by heavy-weight national treasures, such as Jim Broadbent, and the usual period drama mainstays.

It must have proved a bit of a problem when half the cast also found themselves filming

the marathon 20 episodes of festive mash-up Dickensian. Certainly leading actor in both dramas, Stephen Rea, must have got up some days wondering whether he was a tenacious police inspector or a royal count.

On paper, taking characters from Charles Dickens' best-loved novels and throwing them all together in a Victorian soap opera whodunnit sounded a bit like The Ghost of Unoriginal Christmas Shows To Come. But

EastEnders' top writer Tony Jordan has breathed new life into the author's panto villains - making Miss Havisham young and beautiful again and Fagin a flesh peddler, pimping out Nancy to miser Jacob Marley who thoroughly deserves his sticky end.

Meanwhile, ITV's new Game of Thrones-lite fantasy epic Beowulf has managed to suck all the life out of ancient Anglo-Saxon poem.

What happened to the £17million worth of CGI effects? It certainly didn't go on the title graphics and music, which bore more than a passing resemblance to GoT. I know it had to be shown pre-watershed on Sunday evening, but I've seen scarier monsters serving behind the bar at the Old Vic. I swear Grendel had a touch of Pat Butcher about him.

In fact, the episode was more modern soap opera than monster-slaying saga, including the dialogue. "Never judge a book by the cover," snaps a young female blacksmith at Beowulf's lothario pal.

Which books exactly would these be back in the 8th Century?

A drippy-looking Beowulf moons around trying to see his dead stepfather, while his snarling stepbrother Sleam (Downton Abbey's Ed Speleers) tries to pull his hair.

Well, I suppose they have to spin this thing out for 13 episodes.

In which case, expect to see a lot more of "Pat" Grendel plotting evil in a passive-aggressive way.

Put kettle on and you'll miss 7,000 pages of plot



LAVISH
Lily James in War and Peace

An abominably confusing plot? Sher-ly not

In the one-off special of Sherlock and The Case of the Abominable Bride (BBC1), we were led to believe Holmes (Benedict Yummybum) and Dr John Watson (Martin Freeman) were now keeping the streets of Victorian London safe from a cult of grumpy wives - or Loose Women as they are known today.

The gothic setting wasn't entirely convincing. Dr Watson's handlebar 'tache looked more Shoreditch hipster than 19th Century gentleman to me.

And some folk took to Twitter to voice their confusion at the fast-paced storyline. Perhaps scriptwriters Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss ought to pen a 140-character episode just for

them. But the plot was pretty simple and I was hooked: not quite a dream sequence, but a drug trip - an insight into the mind of clever dick Holmes.

His heightened consciousness made parodies of the characters - Watson funnier and sharper, cop Lestrade more stupid, control freak Mycroft gorging himself to death just to win a bet, and the schoolground taunting from Moriarty echoing Sherlock's own fears.

The clues were there, dummies, and apparently if you'd read any of Conan Doyle's books you'd have spotted them. As it was, I was



mostly waiting for the terrifying corpse bride to be unveiled so I could come out from behind the sofa.

We won't see another Sherlock until 2017 while we wait for Cumberbatch and Freeman to crowbar as many Hollywood movies into their busy schedules as possible.

But they will be remembered for this crime-fighting double act long after the blockbuster offers have dried up.

IAN HYLAND IS BACK NEXT WEEK

Dave revisits the Reef

The world's greatest living naturalist, David Attenborough, asks what's so special about north eastern Australia in BBC1's Great Barrier Reef.

Well, it's not the culture, that's for sure. To find that, you have to dive down 300 metres off the coast with David and his team of Octonauts to uncover a vast, vibrant city of underwater housing projects teeming with aggressive hoodie corals fighting for their patch.

Now aged 89, Sir Dave takes us back to the magical world he first

discovered 60 years ago. And in the interests of science, obvs, we get to see black and white footage of a young, buff

Dave in his knitted trunks. Turns out back then, he was a bit of a catch.

This brilliant underwater documentary series is as good as anything the presenter has ever made, and in it he described the reef as "one

of nature's greatest living structures, so enormous you can see it from space".

It's just a shame this wonder has now been usurped by Donald Trump's comb-over.



DISHY The young Attenborough

» Who is the mysterious black rubber-suited monkey rings expert who shows PE teacher contestants how to flick-flack through the toughest obstacle course yet on ITV's returning series of Ninja Warrior UK? Some say he's a jobless Stig moonlighting on a new channel. All we know is, he's called... the Gimp.



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