



SIOBHAN McNALLY

Guest TV columnist

Tarrant's on plight track

Channel 5's new offering is Chris Tarrant: Extreme Railways. But the only extreme thing about this new Channel 5 series, is the extreme length TV executives were clearly willing to go to get the former Who Wants To Be A Millionaire presenter as far away as possible from them.



Other than that, the main thing we learn from this show is that under-investment in railways is a global problem.

Which is why Extremely Old Planes, Trains and Automobiles would perhaps better describe the presenter's itinerary in some of the world's most remote regions.

Looking like an ex vice cop in his padded navy anorak, Chris has the air of a man who went out for a walk in Surrey one day... and found himself in a stretch of desert between Chile and Bolivia.

As tumbledrifts drifts across the vast salt plains in the shadow of the Andes, Chris seems a bit surprised to find himself mostly alone on his travels.

Er... the clue's in the name, Chris - it's called "No Man's Land".

It was soggy bottoms all round at The Great British Bake Off final with Ian and Tamal competing with winner Nadiya to see who could squeeze out the most tears. A dewy-eyed Mary Berry hasn't been that touched since the Danny Dyer incident...

Dog couple barking mad

Back on Channel 5, they're pushing the boundaries and tipping over into voyeurism with last Friday's 41 Dogs in a Three Bed Semi.

In the Barnsley house that's home to 41 breeds of dogs there's plenty of squabbling at mealtimes, but it's the scraps between the couple that get really vicious.

"Shut yer kisser," snarls Lynn at her husband, who admits he doesn't really enjoy sitting among piles of dog poo.

Meanwhile failed magician and ex-Britain's Got Talent contestant Steve had his wife Claire rehomed rather than get rid of the 60 wild animals sharing his rented house.

He openly admitted it was the cost of keeping so many creatures that finally cost him his marriage.

Yes, folks, it WAS the straw that finally broke the camel's back.

Dreary Downton's dying in hospital

WITH plotlines like "Shall we go for a walk?" and "I'll be in the drawing room", it's no surprise the sixth and final series of ITV's *Downton Abbey* is slowly losing its audience.

Although due to the sheer number and length of the show's commercial breaks, I imagine a high percentage of those would have been lost to old age anyway.

It's a shame that a much-loved costume drama that brought us such dramatic moments as "eye candy for the ladies dies in car crash shock" and "turns out we're all wrong, creepy Mr Bates is not a wife killer", should now be bowing out with the "old ladies with too much time on their hands argue over hospital" storyline.

A quick recap for those of you who prefer to sort their sock drawer on a Sunday evening - the Dowager Duchess is at war with Isobel



RANDY Lady Mary's up for it

Crawley over the plan to merge the village cottage hospital with the larger one in York.

"Wouldn't merging the hospitals improve medical care for the locals?" suggests Lady Shackleton, who's been drafted in by Violet to take her side against Lady Cora and Isobel.

"That's not the point," rants Violet. "Wed lose all control of our hospital."

Anyway, I'm not sure why the mean old tyrant should care so much about a service she'll never need - unless they've got a stake in their medical kit - but the plot is getting in the way of the real story of series six: when will we see Lady Mary's new love interest Henry Talbot strip down to his sock

garters? Now that the Earl's randy daughter has given up trying to disguise the fact that she's a complete slapper, she's free to pursue the dashing racing driver, Talbot.

"Is it terribly common to give you my card?" he asks, after turning up unexpectedly to luncheon at Downton with his aunt, Lady Shackleton.

"Yes it is," Mary replies, all cool and ladylike, while clearly imagining him stripped naked and lashed to her bedposts.

The old Dowager demands to know Talbot's prospects, and doesn't seem in the slightest bit fazed to hear that 40 men would have to drop dead before he would inherit a title.

In her cottage hospital, that would be considered an acceptable death rate.

However, let's hope care so much about a service she'll never need - unless they've got a stake in their medical kit - but the plot is getting in the way of the real story of series six: when will we see Lady Mary's new love interest Henry Talbot strip down to his sock

Too much port, my foot.

Mary's given up disguising the fact she's a slapper

Channel 4's brilliant *First Dates* matching experiment last week failed to find love for self-confessed nerd Lachlan. Things were looking hopeful when he met fellow boffin Rachel, until he horrified her with tales of turning body parts into puppets in anatomy class.

"How much sex do I get?" he says to camera when she's in the loo. "Nothing, nada, zip." With chat up lines like his, Lachlan may as well donate his manhood to science.

The most hardworking historian on TV, Lucy Worsley, is back on our screens yet again this year with yet another dressing-up opportunity.

Romping through stories of Georgian rumpy-pumpy in her wig and corset, she presents BBC Four's *A Very British Romance* celebrating the invention of romantic love. I blame the idiot who gave her the key to the BBC wardrobe department in the first place...

TALL TAYLS...

If *EastEnders'* Kathy Beale seems a little heartless for faking her own death to her sons, that's because she is. Her heart, along with all her major organs, must have been removed during the embalming stage of her funeral, which is why she looks as fresh as the day she died. Sadly the same can't be said of Gillian Taylforth's acting skills, which bear a remarkable resemblance to the wooden coffin she was buried in.

Meanwhile, a traumatised Ian comes round in hospital to find he has two hard-faced blonde women fighting over him - and they both look uncannily like his mum.

Doctors say he's suffered bruising from being run over but is going to be all right.

I'd want a second opinion if I was him, because the car seems to have left its spare tyre round his middle.

Neil's archaeo-log-y

Luscious-locked Neil Oliver goes digging to find the real story of the Celts in BBC2's three-part series, *The Celts: Blood, Iron and Sacrifice*.

But despite an amazing haul of bronze artefacts which prove the marauding Celts also liked their bling, Neil - who's more Age of Aquarius than Iron Age - is far more interested in the ancient faecal remains left in a



Celtic salt mine in Austria. "It still smells when it gets wet," sniggers the guide, and we watch as two high-minded prominent archaeologists behave like a pair of schoolboys over an Iron Age poo. "Go on, I dare you touch to it with your tongue," is what I bet any money that Neil said to the Austrian when the cameras were switched off.



MISERABLE Hope

In his new series *For The Love of Dogs* on ITV, Paul O'Grady meets one of the Battersea saddest inmates Hope, an old Labrador-cross whose elderly owner can't cope any more. Miserable and refusing to eat, Paul takes it on himself to win her trust and build her confidence. "Come on, Hope," he urged, "you can't play hard to get at your age. You have to take what comes through the door. We old ones can't afford to be fussy." I'm amazed he didn't rename her "Abandon All Hope".

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WOODEN Taylforth as Kathy Beale

IAN HYLAND IS AWAY