

Reviews

Book chronicles sitcom providing one of John Cleese's wackiest roles

By Shane Hall

REVIEWER

In 1988, more American moviegoers became aware of the talents of British comic John Cleese, thanks to his role in the hit comedy, "A Fish Called Wanda."

Fans of British comedy are well aware of Cleese's hilarious antics in the television series, "Monty Python's Flying Circus" and the several movies the Python crew made. Cleese's roles as the frustrated customer who has been sold a dead parrot and the Minister of Silly Works are among his most memorable works as part of Monty Python.

Fewer British comedy fans, however, may be aware of a short-lived sitcom Cleese starred in during the mid-1970s. The series is "Fawlty Towers," and its 12 episodes showcase some of Cleese's funniest and most outrageous television work.

Pantheon Books has collected together the material that made

"Fawlty Towers" the hilarious show it was. The book, titled "The Complete Fawlty Towers," is a collection of the scripts to the 12 episodes, which were written by Cleese and Connie Booth, who starred in the series as well.

While reading the scripts, the reader will see that good screenwriting was a key ingredient to the show's humor. The book is one that those unfamiliar with the series will find entertaining, but devoted fans and enthusiasts of British humor will find mandatory.

The series itself takes place at the resort hotel, Fawlty Towers, which is situated in the English town of Torquay. Cleese played Basil Fawlty, the owner. Basil is a sarcastic bully whose constant smart aleck remarks make for many a great one-liner. Readers of the book are sure to agree.

Basil's attitude toward the hotel's guests, in the words of his wife Sybil, ranges from "crawling all over them

licking their boots" to "spitting poison at them like some benzedrine puff-adder."

As well as rude and boorish, Basil is also viciously henpecked by Sybil. Played by Prunella Scales, Sybil Fawlty remains maddeningly sane no matter how bad a situation gets.

The other cast members include Polly (Connie Booth), an art student who works as a maid at the hotel; and Manuel (Andrew Sachs), the Spanish waiter whose command of English is between slim and none. It is Manuel who is frequently the target of Basil's bullying.

The series' episodes often center around Basil getting into a nasty predicament, only to sink deeper into trouble as he tries in vain to get out. In these situations, Basil Fawlty is much like a drowning man clutching at straws.

With "The Complete Fawlty Towers," fans will be able to relive the series' many hilarious moments. Those unfamiliar with the show might not

enjoy the book as much, but they will certainly find out what they've been missing.

An example of what they've been missing is the episode titled "The Kipper and the Corpse," in which a guest at the hotel dies in his sleep.

Basil, always jumping to conclusions, is convinced the man has died from the kippers that came with his breakfast. It seems the kippers were old, leading Fawlty to believe that he is on his way to being responsible for poisoning someone.

As the episode continues, Basil and Manuel take extensive pains to hide the corpse, but succeed only in frightening an old lady resident and throwing the entire hotel into chaos.

These and other comic moments are included in "The Complete Fawlty Towers," a book that for some is a good introduction to other silliness from John Cleese. For others, namely those who enjoy the series, the book is a worthwhile addition to the bookshelf.

Although predictable, 'Fletch Lives' Chase's funniest film in years

By Shane Hall

REVIEWER

"Fletch Lives" Starring Chevy Chase Directed by Michael Ritchie Rated PG

Contrary to popular belief, Chevy Chase does appear in good movies every now and then, as demonstrated by his latest, "Fletch Lives." This sequel to 1985's "Fletch" is the funniest film Chase has appeared in in some time. Granted, this is not saying a whole lot when considering past films such as "Funny Farm" and "Vacation."

In "Fletch Lives," Chase returns as investigative reporter Irwin "Fletch" Fletcher. Here, Fletch quits his newspaper job to take over the southern Louisiana mansion his late aunt has left him in her will. He later has a rendezvous with his aunt's gorgeous attorney, who is killed during the night.

Naturally, Fletch is placed high on the list of suspects.

The remainder of the movie is mostly Fletch conducting his own investigation into who the killer's identity and motive. While doing this, Fletch assumes a number of disguises and identities.

Scenes in which Fletch masquerades himself make for some of the movie's funniest moments. One scene features Fletch sporting protruding teeth and pretending to be an exterminator

named Billy Gene King. Another is a hilarious segment at the studios of a television minister. Here, Fletch assumes the role of faith healer Claude Henry Smoot.

In addition to Chase's hilarious antics, "Fletch Lives" boasts a fine supporting cast, including Hal Holbrook as the scheming lawyer Hamilton Johnson and Cleavage Little as Calculus, the black man living on the property Fletch has inherited.

R. Lee Ermy is noteworthy as well for his role as television evangelist Jimmy Lee Farnsworth. This role is a definite switch for the man who played the brazen Sgt. Hartman in Stanley Kubrick's "Full Metal Jacket."

Ermy's performance is an effective parody of television evangelists, portraying them as a combination of snake oil salesman and game show hosts.

In addition to light satire, there is some hilarious slapstick and even a motorcycle chase scene in which Fletch (this time in new clothes pretending the president of Harley Davidson Motorcycles) is being chased by a gang of bearded, leather-clad bikers.

In "Fletch Lives," Chevy Chase gives his best performance on the big screen since his role in "See Like Old Times." Despite being a bit predictable (it doesn't take a genius to figure out who's behind the murder in this movie), "Fletch Lives" is entertaining and is funnier than its predecessor.

KANM

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semester and then are trained to use the equipment.

"It's pretty easy to get involved," Noreyko said.

He says he always has been interested in music, but does not plan to pursue disc jockeying as a career. He just likes being able to play obscure music for his listeners.

"I have been getting a lot of calls in lately from people requesting songs," he said. "Some of them (the songs) I know, but I just don't have them."

KANM is accessible to listeners who have cable stereo. But the station is making some changes that will allow them to be heard by everyone by next fall.

KANM is applying for an FCC license and getting new equipment and a new antenna "like at a real radio station," Noreyko said.

The station manager and the 12-member staff also are going to become more stringent in their operations.

"It's going to make us seem more professional," Noreyko said.

Station Manager Alex Luke agrees. "We will be making changes for the better," he said.

Luke also has a New Age show. Luke said the station wants sound "cleaner" and be able to reach larger audiences.

DJ Nick Kinnebrew, a sophomore horticulture major, said he believes the changes will increase the station's audience.

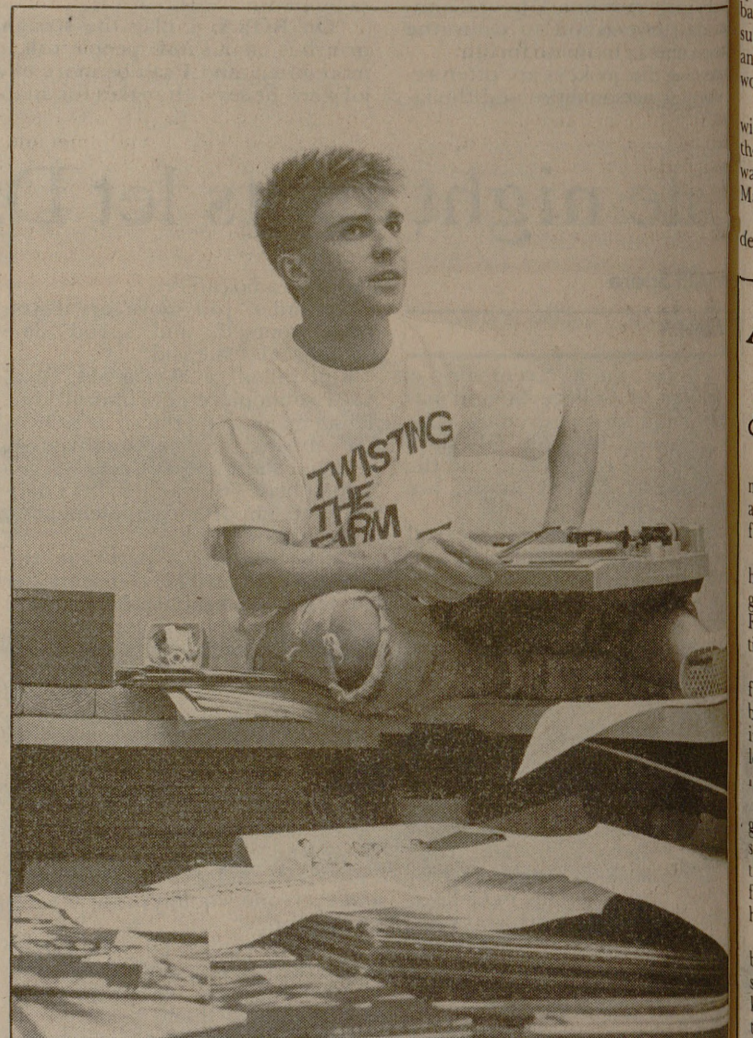
He has been working with KANM off and on since 1986 and now has a reggae show on Fridays from 10 to 2 p.m.

"In 1986, nobody called in," Kinnebrew said. "I just figured nobody listened."

"But this semester, I've been getting many calls and lots of positive feedback. I think I have a few regular listeners."

Kinnebrew, like Noreyko, brings some of his favorite songs from home and creates his own format.

His show is titled "Babylon Nightmares." "Babylon represents a corrupt system, like back in the old days," Kinnebrew said.



KANM station manager and DJ Alex Luke examines one of the station's turntables at KANM studio in the Pavilion.

Late Night

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well," he said.

Nelson explained why the late-night DJs are required to stick to the station's format.

"We want to sound like we're part of a team, and not be abruptly different," he said. "Also, you have to follow format so you don't end up playing the same song another DJ just played."

One advantage of the late-night shift is that the DJs do not have to deal with the commotion and bustle of the office that is present during the day, so the atmosphere at night is much less formal. However, that does not mean that they can slack off and not take the job seriously. There is one listener they always must try to please.

That listener, the one all of these DJs are conscious of, is the one who they will hear from if they slip up on the air or play something that is too far removed from their format, is their boss, the station's programming director or manager.

Often, the late-nighters' shows are automatically taped, to be reviewed by the boss later.

Nelson said the taping isn't the only check on their performance.

"The bosses can actually be listening anytime," he said.

"I think they're always listening."

Morning

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"I do some stand-up (comedic) work as an MC at Garfield's (restaurant) and I stay up until about 12 a.m., then get up for work."

"I have to sleep some time during the day," Davis says. "I get four hours of sleep here and there, which becomes a bit straining. By the weekend, I'm beat because I haven't had a good eight hours of sleep."

"Luckily, I don't do the stand-up work every night."

Davis says it is sometimes difficult to drag himself out of bed and to not come across tired on the air.

"It's hard to fake listeners out," he says. "They can tell when I'm tired or when I'm having a problem. It is very tough to hide it, but I can sometimes fake them out if I'm exhausted."

He says that listeners who are familiar with his voice can tell when he's tired and occasionally call the station to ask how he feels.

"They call and ask if I'm tired or had a fight," he says. "I've had listeners send balloons and flowers to say 'cheer up'."

"I put a lot of myself into the show, and I am the show. If I feel mad about something, I tell the listeners."

"It is a very personable show, because I'm not talking at the listeners but with them. It's not a distant relationship."

In addition to his work as a stand-up comic and master of ceremonies at Garfield's comedy show, Davis is working on putting together a game show that will premiere in April on Channel 24.

Davis will be the host of the show. In the meantime, Davis says, he goes home and takes a nap after

Club DJ

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is different from playing songs for a radio show, Meeks says.

For club play, songs are classified by beats per minute (bpm), and DJs play songs of the same speed in succession, gradually getting faster. For a radio show, there need not be a pattern to the songs.

"It's not set in stone, but generally, you start slow, around 100 bpm, and gradually get faster," Meeks said. "It's really a natural progression, because you can't play a slow song, then a fast one, then another slow one. That would be confusing."

He said after a while the music reaches a point where it just can't get any faster, and the whole chain starts over again on the slow end.

"When I get to the fast point, I usually play something random—with a weird beat—like 'Warm Leatherette' (by the Normal) or 'Gold Rush' (by Yello)," Meeks said. "Then I start again with slower songs."

Meeks says he likes his job and would someday like to work at a large club like Xcess in Houston, which is his favorite because it is "dark, with an overpowering, crystal-clear sound system and good lights," all of which he thinks make a perfect club.

"I'd like to work in a big club because there are so many people," he said. "You can play anything you want and someone is going to like it."

"If I tried to play the same music at Parthenon, I'd be able to see every little tile on the dance floor."

But Meeks' musical tastes are not much different than those of the average club-goer, it is just that he would like to play a wider variety of music.

"There are certain songs I get asked to play every single night I work," he said. "After a while, it just gets to the point where I never want to hear that song again."

Meeks says a perfect example of a too-often requested song is "Bizarre Love Triangle" by New Order. Although he likes the song, he wishes he didn't have to play it every time he DJs in a club.

"It's a great song," he said. "But no matter how much you like it, you get sick of it after awhile."

But Meeks can handle playing a song he doesn't like. One thing he can't handle is taking some re-

quests. "There's an order to things," he said. "Some people come up and demand to hear a song right that minute, even telling me to take the record I have ready off and put on the one they want to hear."

"That really bugs me, because you can't just play anything in any order—that is if you care about what you're doing. And I do."

Crabby requests are only a small drawback to his job, though, and Meeks says he doesn't mind getting them.

"A night without requests just wouldn't be right," he said. "Actually, I like requests because they help me decide what is popular and what the people want to hear. I just don't like when people think their requests are more important than the requests of others who asked before them."

Another reason Meeks would like to work at a large club is the fact that some large ones buy records for the DJ in addition to paying his salary.

Even though he already has close to 700 records, Meeks says it would be nice to have the records provided for him.

"It would help me keep up with the latest releases," he remarked, adding that he hasn't bought many new releases because of their prices.

Meeks is fond of special records called "Razormaids," which are available for DJs. The records contain special mixes of eight different songs and are pressed in colored vinyl. The only problem, he says, is that they sell for up to \$25.

The "Razormaids" are popular also because they sometimes increase in value. For each edition, only a limited number are pressed. Meeks has several older discs which have sold elsewhere for \$200.

Meeks gets most of his records through a mail-order service out of San Francisco, but he was also a member of a record club or "pool," in which he was sent records to critique. Once he listened to the music, he rated it on a scale from zero to five and sent a comment sheet to the manufacturer, keeping the record.

As might be expected, Meeks has had some bizarre experiences in his two years as a DJ. He has seen plenty of fights and people getting sick, abundant weird haircuts and has even had requests, serious ones, for Lawrence Welk music.

While he was working at Rocco's, he saw a turntable ruined

when someone spilled a White Russian drink on it. After that, Meeks said, the turntable acted strangely, sometimes playing backwards and sometimes not working at all.

There was also the time when he forgot to clean the dust and lint off the needle, which caused the tonearm to slide straight across Vicious Pink's "Take Me Now," a popular song at the time.

"The music stopped, and everyone stopped dancing, turned and stared at me," Meeks said. "Luckily, I had another record ready to go and got it started pretty fast."

Meeks, who says he hates to be the center of attention, also faced a still dance floor a couple of months after he started working at Parthenon. It was his birthday, and the bartenders found out about it, took over the microphone and lead the entire club in singing "Happy Birthday."

"That made me feel pretty good, but I was embarrassed as s---," he said.

Meeks says memories like the last one are the ones that keep him working.

"I almost quit a couple of weeks ago," he said. "I've been really busy with school and with job interviews (day jobs) for after I graduate."

Besides a need for money, Meeks says he didn't quit because he likes the job, despite little drawbacks like the nasty requests, standing on your feet all night, ringing ears and lost socializing time.

"It's a fun job," he said. "If I went and didn't have fun, I would quit."

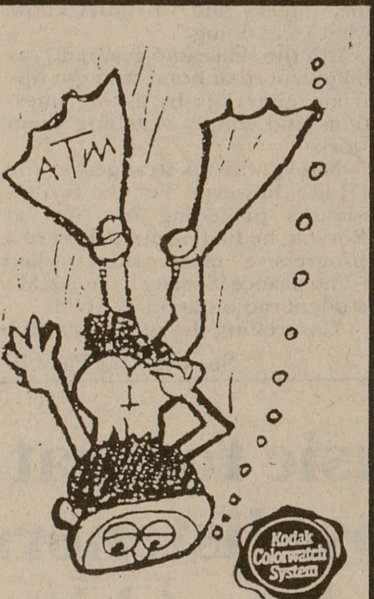
"DJing is like a power trip, to an extent, especially when you first start out," he said. "You're basically controlling what people are listening to and dancing to. It's a great feeling."

Being a DJ has changed the way Meeks looks at music as well. He always has liked progressive music, but once he started playing it at clubs, he didn't want to listen to anything else.

"Top 40 music is okay for the radio," he said. "But once you start liking (progressive music) you kind of block out Top 40 altogether."

Meeks' days as a club DJ in College Station are slowly drawing to a close, as he will be graduating and entering the "real world" in August.

Still, he says he hopes to keep on playing music at clubs on the weekends wherever he gets a job. "I really hope I can," he said.



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