

THE NUMBERS MAN

**a television series in 50-minute episodes
devised by Ken Follett and Gerard Glaister**

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THE NUMBERSMAN

This is a sophisticated drama series about white-collar crime. Its central character is a young accountant with a growing reputation for brilliant financial detective work. In each story a problem is solved by intelligence rather than violence: there is little or no rough stuff. The accountant has a girl, a liberated lady journalist, who is involved in all the stories. They have an affectionate, wisecracking relationship.

The accountant is RICHARD LIDDEL. The only child of a solicitor, he went to a minor public school, took a law degree, then qualified as a chartered accountant. He recently left the old-established firm of Aldiss and Harrison to set up on his own, and he is doing very well.

Superficially he is a rather respectable, conservative young man in a dark suit and short haircut. He is well-spoken, good-looking in a clean-cut way, and respectful to his elders: the kind of chap you'd like your daughter to marry. But his heart isn't in this accountant's image. When he gets home from the office he plays The Stranglers on his hi-fi and hangs around in jeans and bare feet reading Tolkien and RD Laing.

He is ambitious, cynical about businessmen, and intellectually very tough. Behind that desk he can seem positively inhuman, a computer which digests numbers and prints out conclusions, like 'em or not. But off duty, usually when he is with the girl, we may see him being compassionate, foolish or frightened.

He lives with DENISE "NUTSY" NUTTALL, mid-20s. She is bright, literate and exceptionally beautiful. After episode one she walks with a limp. She is highly liberated in an attractive way: braless and self-sufficient rather than tedious or shrill. She is a journalist on a weekly newspaper, officially Women's Editor but - in typical weekly-paper style - doing other jobs too. She has several Fleet Street contacts.

We never say whether Richard and Nutsy are married. Sanctified or not, their relationship is a totally successful modern marriage. They are equal partners, each giving the other strength, affection and joy. However, their deep love is overlaid by a continuous battle of wit, a humourous verbal dogfight. They are both connoisseurs of the barbed joke. Typically, she will be scathing about his split personality - 'straight' at the office and trendy at home - and he will deflate her radical feminism by reading aloud from her schmaltzy Women's Page. They clash like this over all sorts of things, from whether the Beatles are better than Beethoven to Is DH Lawrence a fink? But the disputes never go deep.

Nutsy is much more 'concerned' than Richard. His obsession is with honesty and legality, hers with justice and truth. Sometimes she is his conscience, making him take account of the spirit as well as the letter of the law.

He is no crusader. It's just that he is possessed of an old-fashioned kind of integrity which will not let him turn a blind eye. Nutsy is a crusader, but her investigative instincts are frustrated at work by an incorrigibly sexist editor. She has access to a wider range of information sources than Richard, and she is frequently essential to his work.

Nutsy's editor NEIL RILEY is an occasional reluctant partner in their investigations. A likeable bigot in his fifties, Riley has little time for students, blacks, hippies, gypsies, socialists or women, but calls himself a liberal. He is a big, dissolute, untidy, cuddly man: women always want to take him in, press his trousers, comb his hair and make him go to bed early. His journalistic principles marginally override his politics - so that, while he would not agree to an investigation into local government corruption, nevertheless if presented with the evidence he would publish come what may.

Richard's secretary is MRS MONKTON, a divorcee in her forties. She is not beautiful but she can look quite glamorous at times. Richard is always surprised to learn of her boyfriends: like most young men he forgets that people over forty have a sex life. The boyfriends often have connections useful to Richard.

The stories take Richard and Nutsy into factories, recording studios, film sets, fashion houses, prestige West End offices, dusty City vaults, warehouses, boardrooms and nightclubs. His clients include disgruntled shareholders, insurance companies, oil sheiks, company directors, politicians and pop stars. The stories involve share deals, confidence tricks, sanctions-busting, organised crime, arms sales, and cooked books of every description.

Series sets would be:

(1) Richard and Nutsy's flat. One very large room of a Victorian house in Central London. Doors to hall, kitchen and bedrooms. Rugs, floor cushions, posters, plants, hi-fi with floor-standing speakers, portable TV on a shelf, lots of books and records. Trendy but lived-in.

(ii) Richard's office, integral with an anteroom where Mrs Monkton sits. Very sober and respectable, dark wood and shelves of grim financial tomes. Sherry in a cupboard, hunting prints. On the first floor of a City building.

(iii) Nutsy's office in the newspaper building. Inner London, eg Greenwich. Steel desk, filing cabinets, three telephones, typewriter, and the paperback edition of The Female Eunuch lost beneath a pile of recipes for crab-apple chutney.

Episode one: Sheik, Rattle and Roll (see script)

An oil sheik asks Richard to investigate a small property company with a view to investment. Among the company's assets is a shady 'hostess' club. Richard takes Nutsy there, and she decides to write a feature on hostesses.

Richard finds that the company is making remarkable profits, and suspects that cash is coming into it from some secret outside operation. Nutsy goes to work as a hostess in the club, and discovers that money from the sale of second-hand guns is being laundered through the club.

Posing as a buyer, Richard visits the arms warehouse and checks out Nutsy's discovery. He then tells the oil sheik not to buy.

It turns out that the sheik has been using Richard. He is interested in guns, not the property company. Although angry at being manipulated, Richard warns the sheik that the guns are obsolete.

The boss of the property company, Makepiece, exposes Nutsy as a spy, chases her, and causes her to crash her motorcycle. She is badly injured. In revenge, the sheik has Makepiece murdered.

Episode two: Peanut Blancmange

Nutsy comes home from hospital limping but undaunted. She introduces Richard to TONY GALAXY, singer-guitarist with a successful rock group. Previously he was with Peanut Blancmange, a one-hit-wonder. However, that hit was a Number One, and Tony has been paid only £500. He asks Richard to audit the record company's royalty statement.

The record company is rolling in money. Its president, JUSTIN FUNK (real name Sidney Perkins) is a flashy, foxy type surrounded by girls. He gives Richard a champagne lunch and a none-too-subtle hint that easy women and expensive ~~drugs~~ drugs are on hand for 'our friends'.

Richard finds that Peanut Blancmange have been paid for all their recorded sales. But Nutsy establishes that the recorded sales aren't sufficient for a hit. Then Richard checks with the manufacturers and finds that 100,000 copies were pressed.

Justin Funk explains that the record was not a genuine hit: he hired people to go around the shops used by the chart compilers and buy copies. So where are the remaining 95,000 discs? 'In our warehouse at Camberwell - I'll take you there tomorrow.' Richard goes there tonight, and catches Funk in the act of setting fire to the place. Peanut Blancmange get paid at last.

Episode three: Parliamentary Privilege

An Opposition MP, MICHAEL DUNKLEY, asks Richard to check out a company in which he has been asked to invest: Rapidex, a successful export agency. However, he says, I shouldn't like them to know I've asked you to do this.

Rapidex are doing rather well, exporting agricultural machinery all over the world, growing apace, paying good dividends. But Dunkley wants to know what sort of customers have they got? With Nutsy's help Richard gets some of the customers checked out. Surprise: they are all paper companies, simply buying and selling, many of them owned by Rapidex and its directors.

Inquiries at Lloyds and phone calls to various European ports reveal that the tractors are re-sold several times and may undergo several changes of designation on bills of lading, etc.

Now it turns out that Rapidex have never heard of Michael Dunkley and nobody has asked him to invest in them. In fact he hasn't any money anyway. So what's his game - industrial espionage?

Not so, says Dunkley. Look at the final destination of those exports: they all end up in Southern Africa. Rapidex is a sanctions-busting operation. To prove my motives are public-spirited, I'll let Nutsy break the story.

She does.

Then it turns out that one of the directors of Rapidex is a government MP. He is obliged to resign, and Dunkley gets the last laugh.

Episode four: Musical Shares

English Metals Ltd is selling a subsidiary, NM Engineering, which makes time-switches for domestic appliances. The buyer asks Richard to audit NME's books. Richard finds that NME increased its profit last year despite a recession in consumer durables; but the whole of the profit may be accounted for by one shrewd purchase of components.

Nutsy tells Richard that NME's factory is in her circulation area, and six months ago half the workforce was laid off. The Managing Director of English Metals, one Horace Playfair, is a notorious asset-stripper, she says.

After some difficulty Richard gets sight of the invoice for the components deal, and finds that in fact NME bought finished products from a similar company, Hyams Precision, and merely packaged and resold the switches.

Nutsy goes to Companies House while Richard calls on Hyams. He gets no joy: they are in on the fiddle, whatever it is. Back at English Metals, Richard is about to pass the accounts when Nutsy calls to say that Hyams Precision is owned by Horace Playfair.

Playfair organised the deal with Hyams to prop up NME's profits until it could be sold. Although he loses money on the Hyams deal, Playfair owns shares in English Metals, and Richard is able to show that if NME had been sold as a profit-making concern the gain to English Metals shares would more than compensate Playfair for his loss at Hyams. And Richard's client is saved from a bad investment.

Episode five: Prophan and Loss

A lingerie factory burns down. The company is insured for loss of profits. Richard is hired by the insurance company to verify the estimate of lost profits made by the Managing Director, MAURICE CAPLE.

Richard goes through the management accounts: yes, they were making a profit. He goes through the order book: it is almost empty. Why? This is a short-order business, says Caple.

Nutsy surveys the ladies' underwear market and can't find a single customer for Caple's products. His prices have gone sky-high lately, it seems, while quality has deteriorated. What went wrong with this formerly healthy business? Richard calls on Caple one evening and is introduced to one of his backers, TONY SINGER. Nutsy says Singer is an extortionist.

Richard tells Caple his report will be negative. Caple breaks down and confesses that Singer is taking protection money, hence the company's difficulties: he also suspects that Singer fired the factory when Caple's money ran out. But Caple will not say any of this in court.

Caple speaks to Singer, and Singer calls at Richard's flat and threatens him. Nutsy and a detective emerge from the kitchen, and Singer is charged with extortion. Caple begins to rebuild his business.

Episode six: Inside Job

Richard is hired by PETER ELDRIDGE, a small (£50,000) shareholder in National Freight Forwarding. Eldridge is an intense, almost manic little chap. He put all his money into NFF, but the shares are falling. He says the company is being mismanaged, and he wants evidence to present at the next shareholders' AGM.

Richard meets with considerable hostility from the management, who know Eldridge as a ~~man~~ notorious troublemaker. Nevertheless, the recent dramatic fall in share prices does seem to have been caused by management clumsiness. The latest accounts present an exaggeratedly bad picture, and could have been dressed up a little. And Nutsy finds out that a couple of hostile press reports actually started with boardroom leaks.

Richard discovers that a small company called County Investors has been buying NFF shares. All its directors are women.

Richard visits a major customer of NFF posing as a salesman for a rival freight business. Sorry, they say, we've just done a deal with NFF. The same day NFF forecast a loss for the coming year, and shares fall again. Richard and Nutsy call on some of the directors of County Investors. They are all wives of the directors of NFF. Richard tells Eldridge to hold on to his shares and keep mum.

Sure enough, a few days later the new contract with the major customer is announced, a profit is forecast, and shares go right up. County Investors sell their shares and make a killing: the whole thing was a manipulation by the directors of NFF. But Eldridge won't let Richard report the fiddle to the Stock Exchange Council for fear it will damage the share price of NFF ...