

THE NUMBERS MAN

an idea for a television series  
in 50-minute episodes

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This is a sophisticated drama series about white-collar crime in big business. 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 most of 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 then the LSE before studying accountancy. Now fully qualified and in his early thirties, he is with the old-established firm of Aldiss and Harrison (but not for long).

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 sort of way, and respectful to his elders: the kind of chap everyone wants their daughter to marry. But his heart isn't in this accountant's image. When he gets home from work he plays The Strangers 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. When he's behind a desk he can seem positively inhuman, a computer which digests numbers and prints out conclusions, like 'em or not. But when he is off duty, usually when he is with the girl, we see him being compassionate, foolish or frightened.

He lives with DENISE "NUTSY" NUTTALL, mid-twenties. She is bright, literate and exceptionally beautiful: she might have been a top model but for a pronounced limp. She is highly liberated in an attractive way - braless and self-sufficient rather than shrill and tedious. She is a journalist on a weekly newspaper, nominally a trainee but actually doing

the job of Women's Editor, among other things. She has several contacts on national newspapers.

We never say whether Richard and Nutay 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 humorous verbal dogfight. They are both connoisseurs of the barbed joke. Typically, she will be scathing about his split personality - trendy at home and "straight" at the office - 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.

Nutay is much more "concerned" than Richard. His obsession is with honesty and legality; hers with justice and fair play. Sometimes she is his conscience, forcing him to take account of the spirit as well as the letter of the law.

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

Nutay's editor NEIL RILEY is occasionally a reluctant partner in their investigations. A likeable bigot in his fifties, Riley hates students, hippies, socialists, gypsies, blacks and women, but maintains he is a liberal on the grounds that his employer, the publisher, is Jewish. 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.

When the series opens Richard is still working for Aldiss & Harrison. Auditing the books of the small company, he uncovers a fraud which extends



to the top of the parent conglomerate. For his pains he is fired. He sets up on his own as a financial consultant, and thereafter is hired by a variety of clients to investigate financial dirty tricks in big business.

The work takes Richard and Nutay into factories, recording studios, film sets, fashion houses, prestige West End offices, dusty City vaults, warehouses, docks 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 every kind of cooked books.

Series sets would be:-

(i) Richard and Nutay's flat. One very large room of a Victorian house in Central London. Doors to hall, kitchen and bathroom. Bed in one corner. 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 (from Episode Three on). Very sober and respectable, dark wood and shelves of grim financial tomes, sherry in a cupboard, hunting prints. Elderly secretary in anteroom. City location.

(iii) Nutay'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: Musical Shares

Aldiss & Harrison's biggest client is English Metals, a large corporation with many subsidiaries. They have decided to sell off one of those subsidiaries, NM Engineering, which makes timer-switches for washing machines, dishwashers, etc. The buyers have asked for an up-to-date set of audited accounts.

Old ALDISS gives Richard the job, impressing upon him the need for speed and efficiency, hinting that he should not waste time on unnecessary queries and doublechecks.

Arriving at English Metals head office Richard is honoured by a meeting with the Chairman, HORACE PLAYFAIR. Playfair is charming, dignified and respectable, and urges Richard to call him if he needs anything at all.

Richard finds that NME has increased its profit tax in the last ten months, despite a recession in consumer durables. However, the entire profit may be accounted for by one apparently shrewd purchase of components from Hyams Precision, a firm similar to NME. Richard asks to see the invoice. It is promised tomorrow. Okay, he says, I'll finish the audit tomorrow; and he goes home.

Playfair explains to his buyer that the auditor is an excessively zealous young man who is taking a little longer than expected to complete the work. Beneath Playfair's surface calm is a hint of panic.

Nutay tells Richard that Playfair is a crook. NME's factory is in her circulation area, and six months ago half the workforce was laid off. There were rumours that Playfair was stripping the company's assets prior to selling up, and Nutay tried unsuccessfully to interview him. So what's crooked? The smell, she says; that's all you ever get with these people - the system protects them. Not so, says Richard: if he's a crook, I'll find out.

Richard gets the promised invoice next day, but it's no help: "To components as specified." Richard asks for the specification. At this point

people start to get ratty. Playfair talks to Aldiss: "It's nice to see youngsters being keen, and so on, but look here, you know the importance of this deal ... If your firm can't give us the accounting services we require in a respectably short time, we'll have to look elsewhere," and so on.

Richard is shown the specification. It turns out that Hyams supplied NME with the finished product, which NME simply packaged and re-sold. Once again, Richard postpones signing the accounts.

Now Aldiss puts the heat on. Richard reminds him that an auditor has a legal duty to ensure that the accounts give "a true and fair view of the state of the Company's affairs". Aldiss replies that accountants who upset important clients must not expect to be offered junior partnerships in a hurry.

All the same, Richard admits to Nutsy that he hasn't grounds to refuse to sign the accounts.

Next morning Nutsy goes to Companies House while Richard calls on Hyams Precision. He gets no joy there: if there's a fiddle, they're in on it. When he turns up at English Metals everyone is fuming. Playfair and the buyer are in the boardroom waiting for the accounts.

Richard is about to sign when Nutsy phones to say that the principal shareholder in Hyams Precision is ... Horace Playfair. "I don't get it," she says. "I could understand if Hyams sold to NME at an exorbitant price. Then Playfair would be lining his own pockets."

Ah, says Richard, but Playfair is a substantial shareholder in English Metals, too.

Richard takes the unsigned accounts to the boardroom and explains, in front of the buyer, why he will not sign them. Playfair organised the deal with Hyams to prop up NME's profits until the company could be sold. Playfair personally loses money on the Hyams deal; but Richard is able to demonstrate that if NME had been sold, as a profit-making concern, the



gain to English Metals shares would have given Playfair a net profit.

The buyer drops out.

Nutay: I told you Playfair was a crook.

Richard: And I told you I'd catch him. The system works.

But Richard's vindication is short-lived. English Metals withdraw all their business from Aldiss & Harrison, and Aldiss tells Richard that his services will no longer be required. So much for the system.

Episode Two: Peanut Blancmange

Richard sets up in business on his own account, and Nutay gets him his first client. TONY GALAXY is a singer-guitarist with a successful rock group. Previously he was with Peanut Blancmange, a one-hit-wonder. However, that one hit was a Number One, and Tony has been paid only £500. He asks Richard to audit the company's sales figure. Richard's fee will be 10% of any extra payment he secures. All in all, Tony is not the kind of upright prestigious client Richard is looking for; but beggars can't be choosers.

The record company is rolling in money. Its President, JUSTIN PUNK (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 expensive women and expensive drugs are on hand for "our friends".

Richard finds that Peanut Blancmange have been paid for all their recorded sales. But Nutay 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: Inside Job

With his 10% from Peanut Blancemange Richard opens an office. He is hired by PETER ELDRIDGE, a small (£50,000) shareholder in National Freight Forwarding. Eldridge is an intense, rather 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 AGM in support of a No Confidence motion.

Richard meets with considerable hostility from the management, who know Eldridge as a notorious troublemaker. Nevertheless, the recent dramatic fall in the share price does seem to have been caused by management clumsiness. The last annual accounts presented an exaggeratedly bad picture, and could have been dressed a little for better effect. Also, Nutsy finds out that a couple of hostile press reports actually emanated from top management leaks.

Richard discovers that a small company called County Investors has been buying a lot of 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 in the coming year, and shares fall again.

Richard and Nutsy call on some of the directors of County Investors.

"Miss Robinson?"

"It's Mrs Smith, actually - Robinson was my maiden name ... "

"Miss Jones?"

"Mrs Partridge, for the last ten years. Can I help you ... ?"

Richard tells Eldridge to hold on to his shares. Sure enough, a few days later, the new contract with the major customer is announced, a profit is forecast, and shares go right up.

The directors of County Investors were the wives of NFF's management, Richard explains. They manipulated the share price and made a killing. But Eldridge won't let him report the affair to the Stock Exchange Council for fear it will depress the price of the shares ...

#### Episode Four: Parliamentary Privilege

An opposition MP, MICHAEL DUNKLEY, asks Richard to check out a company in which he has been invited to invest: Rapidex, a highly 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 rapace, paying good dividends. But Dunkley wants to know what sort of customers have they got? With Nutsey's help Richard gets some of the customers checked out. Surprise: they are all paper companies, simply buying and selling, many of them actually 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 destinations of those exports: they all end up in Southern Africa. Rapidex is a sanctions-busting operation. To prove my motives are purely public spirited, I'll let Nutsey 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. Richard: We were used ...

Episode Five: Prophet and Less

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

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

A somewhat embarrassed Richard surveys the ladies underwear market and can't find a single customer for Caple's product. 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 knows of Singer, and says he is a gangster.

Richard tells Caple his report will be negative: the factory would not have made money. Caple practically weeps. Richard gets a somewhat menacing call from Singer, who says he is coming to the flat.

Singer arrives and threatens Richard. Nutsy and a detective emerge from the kitchen. Singer is charged with extortion and Caple is held on suspicion of arson.



Episode Six: Sheik, Rattle and Roll

An oil sheik, RAMIR ALI, asks Richard to check out a property company with a view to investment. Richard does so. These guys are superficially respectable, but some of their nightclubs and West End flats are a little dubious. Richard explains this to Ali.

Yes, says Ali, but are they involved in anything illegal? Nutsy gets a job as a hostess in one of the clubs, and discovers that the company also deals in guns - quite legally. She photocopies some papers as proof.

Ah, says Ali, then I will not do business with them. Yes, you will, says Richard; in fact you've already placed an order for guns, according to those papers. The property deal thing was a fiction - you just wanted to make sure they had the guns to sell you. Well, I have one more piece of information for you: the guns are okay but you won't be able to buy ammunition for them - it's no longer made.

Another satisfied customer.

A week later the arms dealer is murdered by a traditional Arab method of killing. Richard shudders and thinks nostalgically of Aldiss & Harrison ...