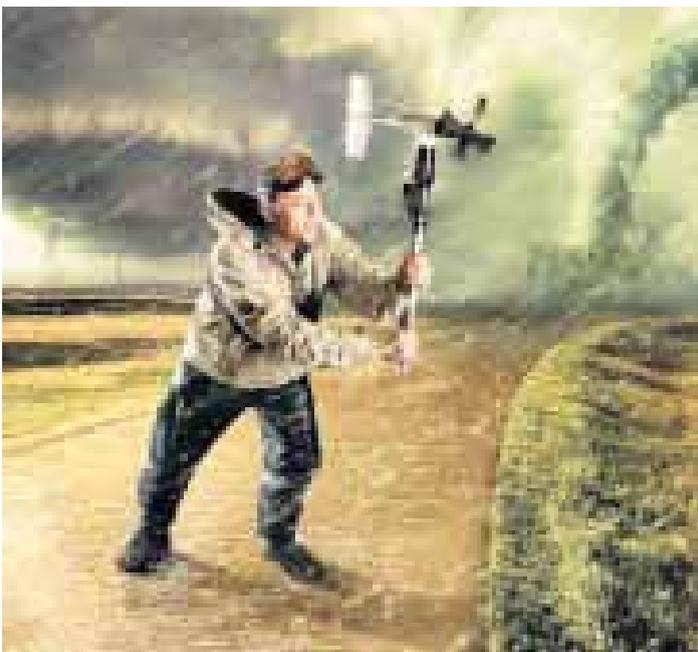


tv&radio

last night's tv



A perfect storm

Tim Teeman



**Cutting Edge:
A Very British
Storm Junkie**

Channel 4

★★★★★

**Who Killed
Scarlett?**

Channel 4

★★★☆☆

(AD) Audio Description
(SL) In-vision signing
(HD) High Definition
(r) repeat

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A **Very British Storm Junkie** was so perfect — an eccentric, wonderful jewel — that initially you thought that it had to be a spoof and that Stuart Robinson, and his partner-later-wife Alison Baker were played by actors. Stuart sounded like the excitable lovechild of David Coleman and Alan Partridge. From their little house in Leicestershire he tracked storms and hurricanes on his computer and then jetted off to drive into the eye of them. How you know when you're in the eye of a storm was unclear. It was only at the end that Stuart realised that the real storm was at home: could he survive Hurricane Alison at full force?

The scale of Alison's disapproval of being a "storm WAG" was first limited to a roll of the eyes. Stuart said he had spent his childhood with nose pressed against the window listening to the thunder. In 1998 he had observed his first tornado, and had since experienced 30, and six hurricanes. But he still had to actually experience the eye of the hurricane. In his garage he revealed his storm kit, which included baked beans to be eaten in a hurry. First Stuart went to Taiwan where, at the airport, he met Roger from Denver, his "storm buddy", who he seemed happier to see than Alison. "We've experienced some pretty wild weather together," rhapsodised Stuart, as he remembered all those twisters and trees falling down and buildings collapsing. "Oh, that's for sure," said Roger, looking equally enraptured.

They rented a car, explaining that they were driving into the eye of a hurricane so needed full insurance. They chased the storm and their joy was almost orgasmic: "The thunder... oh my God"; "Look at the amount of vegetation blowing around!" The eye was eight miles south, but suddenly the storm changed direction and they had missed it. Like Alison, you rolled your eyes: this was a mad pursuit.

The first sign that Stuart was blundering into emotionally dangerous territory came when he joked, or didn't

joke, that his and Alison's wedding day in March had been chosen with "the weather season" in mind: "Tornadoes in May and June and tropical storms in September". "Most women wouldn't stand for it," said Alison, not really smiling that much. "You're one in a million dear," said Stuart. Oh Stuart, you thought, you are so playing with fire here. Retreat. Too late.

How dare he say that their wedding day had anything to do with storms, Alison remonstrated. Stuart was still smiling, the fool. On the day it rained: determinedly English rain... constant, dogged. The tables at their reception had names such as Cloud, Monsoon and Tornado. Alison said she was hopeful that if they had a family Stuart would stop storm-chasing, but he said, "If I'm not storm-chasing I'm thinking of storm-chasing". Soon he was in Kansas with Roger, driving through the dark heart of a twister with demented, punch-drunk excitement. He emerged, unscathed, to exclaim to his beloved: "I thought we were toast then, Rog".

He said that if Alison asked him to give it up he would. But after a brush with Hurricane Gustav (he and Roger got out of their cars and deliriously enjoyed the force of a category 2 hurricane), came Hurricane Hannah: this was the storm that broke the camel's back. Alison told him she wanted him to come home.

An excruciating set of tense phone calls ensued. He said he had been walked over for too long. He first asked if he could go to North Carolina to experience Hannah (the woman's name gave it the sense of adultery), then when that was refused he said he was going anyway. Alison held firm. "You're putting an emotional gun to my head," he said. Alison prevailed. "I'm doing the right thing and going home to see my wife," Stuart said meekly. In the end Hurricane Hannah abated and we left Stuart and Alison eating a roast. Did he want another roast potato, asked Alison. Hmm, wavered Stuart, he'd left room for crumble. The storm had passed but the directors Nick Holt, Olly Lambert and Pete Woods had taken us, brilliantly and wittily, into the eye of the storm.

Who Killed Scarlett? followed Fiona MacKeown as she tried to grieve for her daughter Scarlett Keeling (*below*), murdered on a Goan beach last February, and also discover who killed her. She believed that there has been a police cover-up and you felt every ounce of her frustration as she found herself criticised for her "hippy" lifestyle and parenting skills as if either somehow excused the tragedy she and her family had suffered.

Does living in caravans and without electricity mean you don't deserve justice or even to be able to bury your daughter (whose internal organs have gone missing or been destroyed)? It's shameful that the hunt for Scarlett's killer or killers has been botched and delayed. The Goan authorities should be ashamed, not Ms MacKeown.

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today's tv

viewing guide

David Chater



Free Agents Channel 4, 10pm

**Pick
of the
day**

This new comedy, wallowing in obscenity, is about a dysfunctional couple failing to have an affair. I enjoyed it a lot, although I probably wouldn't recommend it to my 84-year-old mother. The couple concerned are a recently divorced man (Stephen Mangan) and a colleague (Sharon Horgan) whose fiancé dropped dead at the age of 34.

The Mangan character is broke and as sexually sophisticated as a 15-year-old born-again Christian, while his non-girlfriend suffers from post-traumatic death disorder. They work together in an actors agency run by a cynical old goat (Anthony Head), out of whose mouth pours unending filth. Deep beneath the brittle layer of self-conscious trendiness, it is an old-fashioned love story with its own charm.

Natural World BBC Two, 8pm

Japanese snow monkeys, or macaques, are in a photogenic league of their own. But, alas, every winter, thousands of them struggle to overcome starvation, disease and the bitter cold. As the temperature drops to -30C (-22F), they huddle together in miserable clusters and live off tree bark. Come the spring, more die in torrential flooding and another 5,000 a year are killed by angry farmers. But please don't let that put you off. Despite everything they have to endure, these guys are stars.

Trial & Retribution ITV1, 9pm

DS David Satchell (Dorian Lough) has been with *Trial & Retribution* since it began ten years ago. He tends to play a supporting role, while DCS Walker (David Hayman) and DCI Roisin Connor (Victoria Smurfit) do all the screaming and shouting. But in this two-parter, he dominates the show. He was already looking distracted after a mauling in the witness box by a clever QC at the start of last week's episode. As the long-running investigation into a criminal family continues, his fragile state of mind deteriorates a lot farther when a man is shot in cold blood in front of him and his wife and daughter are abducted in broad daylight. It's a convincing and immensely watchable performance.

Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA Channel 4, 9pm

You won't believe this. In the second episode of his full-on American series, Gordon Ramsay visits Hannah and Mason's, a bistro in Cranbury, New Jersey. Instead of the programme you would expect (disgusting food, filthy kitchen, dysfunctional staff) he sits down and samples their menu. It is one of the best meals he has ever tasted. He bows his head, and — in a scarcely audible voice — admits he can sometimes be wrong. He apologises to all the people he has ever offended. He says he will donate 90 per cent of his fortune to charity and will be retiring to a Buddhist monastery in Devon. If only.

film choice

Stephen Dalton

The Lady Vanishes (1979) Channel 4, 1.35pm

The last production by the low-budget British horror studio Hammer, *The Lady Vanishes* breaks cinema's golden rule about never remaking Hitchcock, and almost gets away with it. Cybill Shepherd and Elliott Gould play the only two passengers who suspect foul play after Angela Lansbury's fellow traveller disappears from a train crossing Europe on the brink of the Second World War. Ian Carmichael, Herbert Lom and Arthur Lowe lurk among the chorus of caricatures and eccentrics. (95min)

Trading Places (1983) Sky Movies Comedy (HD), 8pm

A feel-good comic parable starring Eddie Murphy as a homeless beggar who swaps places with Dan Aykroyd's blue-blooded yuppie as part of a wager between a pair of scheming corporate bosses. (118min)

Weird Science (1985) BBC One, 11.40pm

Written and directed by the Brat Pack founding father John Hughes, this adolescent twist on Frankenstein mythology partly takes place in the same fictional high school as the more celebrated *The Breakfast Club*, which Hughes also scripted. Anthony Michael Hall and Ilan Mitchell-Smith play nerdy computer geeks who artificially create the "perfect woman", in the form of Kelly LeBrock, who breaks free of their control. *Weird Science* is a silly male fantasy, but also a harmlessly kitsch historical curio. (94min)