

# MARTIN KELNER



THE RENOWNED TV CRITIC WITH HIS WEEKLY COLUMN

**W**HEN one discovers – and I hope you never do – a mysterious growth in the abdomen, what are the odds on it turning out to be benign? No seriously, what are the odds? Because I'm finding consultants in the life-and-death section of my local hospital reluctant to put up any kind of market.

Apparently I have a tumour the size of a grapefruit. Tumours are always compared to fruit in the same way news reports refer to areas of the Third World devastated by floods as being the size of Wales, and something else – I forget what – as the size of two double-decker buses. Always large fruit, as well. I've never heard of anyone having a tumour the size of a raisin.

Anyway, this is my excuse for being absent from these pages for the past few weeks, and I think you'll agree it beats the hell out of the dog ate my homework. I have to have another scan, and if at all possible the best that cutting-edge (quite literally) surgery has to offer will get to work on removing the grapefruit.

I'm hoping it's benign, although I feel it would have been way more benign of it to go and lodge somewhere else, or turn out to be trapped wind. Also, I'm reminded of Evelyn Waugh's words when Randolph Churchill had a benign tumour removed from his lung: "It seems to me to be a typical triumph of modern science to find the only part of

## Business as usual on C4 for royal reverence

Randolph that was not malignant, and remove it."

For the moment, though, I feel fine and it seemed a shame to let Channel 4's first bash at Royal Ascot pass without comment. I notice Charlie Sale in the Daily Mail has been getting awfully exercised about a 40 per cent drop in viewing figures compared with last year's coverage on the BBC, but the way TV ratings work I think Channel 4 can be more relaxed than Charlie about that. It's worrying, but not life-threatening.

I remember having a conversation with Caroline Aherne around the time her comedy *The Royle Family* migrated from BBC2 to BBC1 and being puzzled by her excitement. "Two million more viewers," she told me, the mind-boggling implication being that two million people who might be inclined to like a TV show won't go to the trouble of seeking it out if it's on BBC2 and not BBC1. It's one button down, for god's sake.

To persuade folk to make the long and hazardous journey from channel

one to Channel 4, with the possibility of being waylaid by *Flog It!* or the Alan Titchmarsh Show on the way, might therefore turn out to be the work of more than one year.

It's also worth taking note of the 'royal' in the name of the meeting. There's a symbiosis between the BBC and the royal family going back to the

Coronation, when they allowed cameras into Westminster Abbey ushering in the modern age of television. Ever since then, people have looked to the BBC for royal coverage and remain reluctant to go elsewhere, let alone to the channel of Jimmy Carr and Davina McCall, to gawk at our first family.

**T**HAT being the case, Channel 4 Racing's fatal mistake – apart from the miserable dearth of decent tips over the week – was to try to match the BBC in forelock-tugging, self-debasing obeisance to the royals and their chums. "Here on Channel 4, we're bringing you something new," the coverage kicked off, but apart from hanging around for the last two races to enable those chasing their losses to do themselves serious damage, it was business as usual.

I mean, I am no diehard republican. I would want a few serious meetings before we started stringing people up

from lampposts, but even I am fed up with being told year after year how immaculately turned out the Queen is, how clever she is with colours and so on.

Are we really meant to believe the Queen stands at the mirror, trying on outfits, asking the Duke, "Does my bum look big in this?" or (the hardest question a man ever has to answer) "Which shoes do you think with this outfit?" Of course she doesn't. There is someone paid – ultimately by us – to sort all that out.

Sure, the royal patronage helps racing, but must Channel 4 conspire in the guff that surrounds it? "The Queen is in a peach frock coat, and a matching pink dress. She looks amazing," gushed fashion expert Brix Smith-Start on day one, "You know what I like about the Queen? She's got such an iconic style, but she embraces colour in a way that is unbelievable. She lifts all our spirits."

This went on all week and, in the cause of remaining benign, I shall draw a veil over some of the car crash moments, and just express my unyielding appreciation of the ever-smiling Brix (crazy name, crazy gal), who remarkably used to be a guitarist in Manchester post-punk band *The Fall*, and was married for five years to lead vocalist Mark E Smith. Really.

Have a look at Mark (left) and I defy you not to say, "What the . . . ?" Until I hear that Nigel Farage has opened a vegan cafe and craft centre, I should say Brix's is the greatest reinvention of modern times.

Mark E Smith: "What the . . . ?"



### EXCLUSIVE RACING POST READER COMPETITION

# WIN

A VIP DAY AT THE

# CORAL-ECLIPSE

#### PRIZE INCLUDES:

- ▶▶ Entry for two to Coral's private box on Coral-Eclipse day
- ▶▶ Champagne on arrival
- ▶▶ Buffet lunch
- ▶▶ Afternoon tea
- ▶▶ Complimentary bar
- ▶▶ £100 worth of betting vouchers
- ▶▶ £100 towards travelling expenses

Don't miss this chance to enjoy a spectacular day with a guest at one of the highlights of the Flat season. The Group 1 Coral-Eclipse, part of the British Champions Series, provides the first opportunity for the Classic generation to race against their elders at the highest level. This year's Coral-Eclipse day, on Saturday, July 6, is sure to provide another thrilling contest at Sandown and Coral have teamed up with the Racing Post to offer this great prize.

For your chance to win, simply answer the following question correctly:

**Who won last year's Coral-Eclipse?**

- A) Nathaniel    B) Frankel    C) So You Think

**CALL:** 0901 609 1730

**TEXT:** ECLIPSE followed by a space then your answer, name and address to 87088

**EMAIL:** [rpcomp@racingpost.com](mailto:rpcomp@racingpost.com) with your answer, name, address and contact number

