

THE CUT

"Episode One"

By

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Log-line: *In a world without experts - where trope trumps truth - an unlikely male duo must find passage through the canals of post-apocalyptic London; to peace and freedom in the 'Promised Land' beyond - Bristol.*

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BLACK

 TOBY (GRAVELLY, MATURE, V.O.)
Some say it started with the War On
Terror. Others that the World
Health Organisation dropped the
ball. Of course, no-one denies the
pervasiveness of the internet as a
factor. A few blame God... and / or
the LGBT. Me? From what I've pieced
together, it started when the buses
stopped taking cash fares.
 (beat)
After that, it was only a matter of
time.

SUPER: "June 30th, 2083."

SUPER FADES IN: "Roydon, Essex. England."

FADE IN:

EXT. CANAL-SIDE - DAWN

A full-moon is fading. Early dawn light doing what it can to illuminate and warm the scene. Despite its best efforts, everything remains silhouetted for now; vague shapes and shadows.

Nevertheless, it becomes quickly evident the scene is that of a deserted stretch of canal. SILENCE.

A web of floating pennywort drifts calmly by; two coots sitting comfortably atop it. HOOT. HOOT. On the towpath lies some broken fencing, a little rubble. An owl HOOS. Poking out of the rubble is a tattered metal sign, "No Smoking."

In the distance, a gentle, yet alien, THRUM-THRUM-THRUM sound rises. The owl, startled, flaps away.

The THRUMMING gets louder, closer. The coots HOOT to each other again, a bit unsettled. Their makeshift nest starts to rock. HOOT. HOOT. HOOT. They slip off into the water, with a splash, and paddle away from the disturbance.

A solid, black, shape cuts through the water, knocking the pennywort aside with ease - the prow of a vessel gliding along in the darkness. THRUM-THRUM-THRUM.

On the towpath a single, spoked, rubber, wheel accelerates past - gently CRUNCHING on the gravel.

EXT. CARTHAGENA LOCK - DAWN

A typical lock on the run to London down the River Lea. Again, the dim light only teasing details for now. Signs of an old lock-keeper's cottage - long abandoned. Two lock gates; manually operated, with manual paddles, too. The paddles' signature rack-and-pinion fixings reach a few feet skywards, an unmistakable silhouette. The only sound, or movement, is the constant MURMUR of water escaping through the leaky gate.

Three almost-military figures lie in wait at the upper gate - concealed behind their 'uniforms' - balaclavas, boots, a swarth of piecemeal riot gear - and the massive balance-beam there... resting their backs against the latter. Even in the shadows it's clear they make for a formidable team: ROD (50), JANE (early-20s), and FREDDY (25-35). Rod has the grizzled bearing about him of a seasoned veteran; the squad leader. Jane, though the youngest, already easily passes for a fine soldier - regimented, unquestioning, sharp in her wit and movement. Or rather, currently, lack of movement. No sign of humour, or humanity, left there. Freddy?... Freddy must have had nowhere else left to go after leaving school. A fine physical specimen, a career Grunt, but slow and sloppy in his demeanour.

He - Freddy - finishes rolling a cigarette, presenting it to Rod for inspection. The latter squints across in the gloom, then nods his approval. Freddy digs out a counterfeit Zippo from the depths of a pocket. He flips it open trying, and failing, to light in one flashy, practiced, trick-flourish. It emits a sad, feeble, knock-off CHING in reply, but no flame. He closes it. Tries again. Nothing but the sad CHING. It's closed a second time, Freddy about to repeat the exercise when the walkie-talkie on Jane's vest CRACKLES, interrupting his movement. Jane snatches the offending transceiver up to her ear, abruptly dialling down the volume.

METRO CONTROL (OVER WALKIE-TALKIE)

Tango Three. Metro Control. Vessel
should be in range by now. Do you
have visual?

Jane fires a look to the still frozen Freddy. In response he makes to lift his binoculars - finding himself for a moment awkwardly attempting to juggle the lighter, the roll-up, and the new task all at once. Jane coolly relieves Freddy of the lighter, plucking it from his grasp. He's not likely to see that again. His face falls, but the hint is taken. He swiftly raises his binoculars, pops his head over the beam, and turns to view up the canal.

INSERT BINOCULARS POV

The mysterious prow, still distant, continues steadily forwards.

BACK TO SCENE

Freddy snaps back, almost mimicking a real soldier for an instant. Hunkering down, pocketing the binoculars, he nods to the awaiting Jane.

FREDDY
(Whispering)
Affirmative

JANE (INTO WALKIE-TALKIE)
(Whispering)
Metro Control. Tango Three.
Affirmative. We have visual.

ROD
Range?

FREDDY
About a half click.

A couple of seconds pass. Rod tosses a box of matches across.

ROD
C'mon. Flame up, then.

Freddy obediently fetches the cigarette back up, lights it, with the strike of a match, and takes a draw.

METRO CONTROL (OVER WALKIE-TALKIE)
By the book, Tango Three. Intel
suggests three, possibly four,
Unregistered. No other information
available. Engage and eliminate.

Jane looks at Freddy exasperated, then to Rod, less so.

JANE (INTO WALKIE-TALKIE)
(Whispering)
Roger that.

EXT. CANAL-SIDE - DAWN

THRUM-THRUM-THRUM

The bow continues to cut through the murky waters. It CRACKS against some thick wooden flotsam, splitting it.

EXT. CARTHAGENA LOCK - DAWN

The THRUM-THRUM-THRUM can now be heard, very faint, very quiet, here at the lock. It mingles with the MURMUR of water. Jane risks a quick squint behind to the target, shooting back to her hunkers swiftly. Then a piercing look to Freddy.

JANE

Psst.

Freddy catches on and passes her the smoke. She looks to Rod. He nods. She takes a drag.

FREDDY

Sar..

Rod cuts him off.

ROD

Patience. Restraint. Manners.

FREDDY

Manners?

ROD

Yes. Manners. Separates us from the beasts, trooper. Beasts, these Unregistered. And worse.

(beat)

Restraint. Keep your urges in check. Perform your duty. What's expected, nay - demanded - by society.

Freddy nods as if in understanding.

FREDDY

And my position.

ROD

Exactly. Do you think we - not us, humanity - d'you think we'd be in this situation... scurrying around in the dark, scavenging with vermin, defending our territory... if people had only minded their manners? Showed some restraint?

FREDDY

No, sir.

ROD

Range?

Freddy pops his binoculars back up...

INSERT BINOCULARS POV

A view comically identical to the previous; the mysterious prow remains distant, slowly ploughing towards the ambush.

BACK TO SCENE

Freddy whips the binoculars back down.

FREDDY
Point four-five clicks.

Jane offers the cigarette to Rod, who receives it from her, but doesn't take a draw yet.

JANE
All due respect... I don't follow,
Sarge.

Rod smiles knowingly.

ROD
Manners, right? Is a set of rules
for society. Like a chain of
command.

He goes to take a drag.

JANE, FREDDY
Yeah?

The cigarette stops short of Rod's lips, so he can continue his lecture; hand drooping back to his chest.

ROD
Look, I've got no problem with
people and their opinions, right?
Or their **urges**... No matter how
unnatural, if you ken what I mean.
But they need to be kept in check.
You can't rock the boat. It's
exactly that sort of thing is that
led to Two-Four.

JANE
You're saying this.. all of this..
came from some sort of bad manners?

ROD
In a way, aye.

He goes again to take a drag of the smoke, but realises his audience have lost him. He lowers his voice conspiratorially.

ROD

Urges? *Unharmonious* with society...
it's conventions and best
interests?

Everyone pauses. The water MURMURS. The distant THRUM-THRUM-THRUM continues. Freddy darts up, binoculars, down.

FREDDY

Point four clicks.

He glances eagerly to the cigarette, smouldering away in Rod's fingers still. Jane's face contorts ever so slightly, testing to see if she's got this right.

JANE

The homosexuals?

Rod grins, encouraging Jane to elaborate.

JANE

Extinction level event?
(Beat)
Bad manners? And... the
homosexuals?

Rod grins again, beaming now. He nods in approval of their perceived understanding.

ROD

One and the same thing.

He finally takes a draw of the cigarette before continuing.

ROD

At the end of the day, it was the
poofers.

SHWIIIIICK! THUD!

Rod falls dead, an arrow through his face, lodged deep into the wooden beam. SHWICK. SHWICK. Two more arrows. A SQUEAL. A pained GASP. Freddy through the neck - also dead. Jane her right shoulder - pinned to the beam behind. She MOANS in pain, tries to free the arrow a couple times. A gentle CRUNCH of gravel indicates a newcomer. A single, spoked, rubber tyre enters. Sobbing, Jane looks up at her assailant.

Before her is TOOVEY. A cloaked youth, baseball cap - looking 18yo, tops - bow strung and drawn, left-handed. He balances skilfully on a unicycle. Jane's walkie-talkie CRACKLES again.

METRO CONTROL (OVER WALKIE-TALKIE)
Tango Three, sit-rep?

Toovey and Jane stare, weighing each other up.

METRO CONTROL (OVER WALKIE-TALKIE)
Tango Three, sit-rep?

Jane, painfully - eyes still on Toovey - moves her left hand to her walkie-talkie, tilting her head towards it. Presses the talk button.

JANE
Hostiles neutralised. 4 counted. No casualties this side.

METRO CONTROL (OVER WALKIE-TALKIE)
Roger that. Good job.

Jane's hand drops from the walkie-talkie, clutching the embedded arrow instead.

JANE
Please?

Toovey looks back at her. Shrugs almost sympathetically.
SHWICK! THUD.

EXT. CARTHAGENA LOCK - DAY (LATER)

The sun has risen. A 42' narrowboat rests in the lock, facing downstream. She's almost ready to clear, in fact: gently THRUM-THRUM-THRUMing on tick-over. The steep chamber walls ensure she remains largely hidden from view, though. There's a glimpse of a chimney, a 'dogbox', and a camo-coloured kayak on the roof. A mid-line is tied to one of the lock bollards, but that's about all to be seen whilst she remains inside the lock. A small grill smokes on the lockside. Toovey's candy-red unicycle parked beside it.

EXT. CARTHAGENA LOCK/UPPER LOCK GATE - DAY

Jane lies dead, a second arrow through her walkie-talkie, into her heart.

SPENCER (OS)
Fewl!

His figure leans forward, three arrows already in hand, grabbing the final shaft. He wiggles it, and yanks it free. The arrows are transferred to his left hand as he hunkers down before the body.

SPENCER (OS)

Could have salvaged something from the cee-bee. Even the battery's cuffed, now. Here. Take your arrows back.

EXT. CARTHAGENA LOCK - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Spencer, early forties to look at - a weathered woollen poncho, jeans underneath - continues to regard Jane's corpse with a degree of genuine sadness. Rod and Freddy remain slumped motionless beside her.

Still facing the bodies, Spencer's right hand strokes his neat goatee; left arm outstretched behind - blindly offering the arrows away. Spotting something amongst the bodies, his hand goes from beard to the faux Zippo there... picking it up. He swiftly inspects it, still hunkered down. Toovey, now uncloaked, moves over to join. Spencer tosses the lighter away, recognising it as useless. Toovey reclaims his arrows one-handed, half a sandwich already in the other. He inspects the projectiles casually for damage. Spencer spies the matchbox now, picking it up, and giving it a satisfying rattle towards Toovey: a 'told-you-so' sort of action.

TOOVEY

Next time **you** sneak up on the hidden superior forces, by the light of a full moon, take them out - silently, I might add - and start on breakfast. I'll drive the bus. Pinky promise?

He offers up his pinky. Spencer vanishes the matches away into his poncho. His hand returns from the folds of material flipping Toovey the bird. Then he stands up.

TOOVEY

(Muttering)

Prick.

SPENCER

Love you, too, Toov-ster. You're a veritable ninja turtle. We'd be lost without you.

Toovey takes a second in silence to consider the dry delivery, evidently deciding to take it at face value.

TOOVEY

Damn straight. And don't you forget it.

SPENCER
C'mon. We're done here.

EXT. CARTHAGENA LOCK - DAY (MOMENTS LATER)

Toovey creaks open one of the lower gates, his back set hard against the massive beam - the narrowboat's signature THRUM-THRUM-THRUM becoming more audible as he does so. The pitch increases; she's moving now, about to emerge. GRAND MUSIC is heard, actually emanating and reverberating from within the lock... from speakers on the boat's deck!

Her nose edges out: the mysterious, dark prow of before. The grandness of the MUSIC grows, reaching a crescendo as... a totally unassuming narrowboat reveals through the open gateway. At best you could call her "cute" - traditional paint, cruiser stern, portholes along each side. The rear-most porthole glows from a gentle purple light on, inside the cabin. A far from impressive vessel. In no way intimidating. The grand MUSIC continues regardless.

Spencer pilots her out with all the pride, and affection, of Captain Kirk leaving Space-dock. Despite this, there are clear signs of wear-and-tear. This is a maintained, but not a polished, vessel. The paint is dulled, some of it flaking off. Minor dents and scratching can be seen. There's indication of a past fire. Chintzy lettering finally identifies her as she drifts past: *Just Ducky*.

In a well-practised drill, *Just Ducky* clears the gate, and Toovey begins immediately swinging it back closed. The boat continues away. Toovey holds the gate for a few more seconds. Evidently satisfied, he now dashes over to his unicycle, picks it up, scampers across the bridge, and down the towpath to catch up.

EXT. CANAL-SIDE - DAY

Just Ducky cruises smoothly down an idyllic stretch of river. Spencer steers by a tiller from the vessel's rear. The sun is shining. It all makes for a glorious day. There's no sight nor sound of anyone else around, bar some canal-side wildlife. Even *Just Ducky's* THRUM-THRUM-THRUM and the MUSIC from her speakers - volume dialled back a bit - seems serene in this setting.

Eventually, the SHRILL WHISTLE of a kettle boiling inside the boat does break the serenity. Some movement from within resolves it, winding down into more of a steamy SIGH.

Spencer continues to skipper the boat along.

EXT. "JUST DUCKY" - MOVING - DAY

From the rear door, Toovey steps up, and out onto the stern to join Spencer; bringing with him two cups of hot, black, tea.

SPENCER

Dad OK?

TOOVEY

Yeah. Toby's fine. Aren't you, Tobes?

Toovey takes a quick double-take behind him to the cabin.

TOOVEY

Yeah. He's fine.

Toovey turns, propping the teas up on the roof. A moment passes as they just continue down the river in silence.

Spencer cranes his neck, peering into his cooling cup.

SPENCER

We out?

TOOVEY

Not exactly. What was left smelled pretty manky, though. I chucked it.

SPENCER

Fridge fubar'd?!

TOOVEY

Nah, seems cold enough. Just old coo-juice.

SPENCER

Hmmm. Might get lucky before we hit the city. Keep your eyes open either side.

Spencer's eyes remain forward, focussed on where they're headed.

TOOVEY

Sure. Will do.

However he looks, instead, slyly down into his hands - where the previously discarded Zippo is secreted.

EXT. CANAL-SIDE - DAY

More quiet, green, countryside. Not a soul, no traffic, nor other boats in sight. Livestock in the fields edge slowly away as the THRUM-THRUM-THRUM nears.

EXT. "JUST DUCKY" - MOVING - DAY

Still on the Lea Navigation, Spencer driving. Toovey has made his way onto the roof, where he now sits cross-legged, near the kayak. In his hand is a compact, wicked-sharp, blade - nonchalantly sorting his arrows and maintaining his bow.

The engine THRUMS in the background, as usual. MUSIC plays from the speakers. Toovey sings along... badly. Out of tune. Getting the lyrics wrong. This situation clearly agitates Spencer.

"All Along The Watchtower" starts up, Toovey nodding along to the intro with a real passion, eyes closed, drumming on the roof in parts. As the lyrics begin, he lets rip;

TOOVEY

There must be some way out of here,
said the yogi to the leaf. There's
too much confusion... mmm-mm-mm-mm-
mm-mm-mm. Policeman they drink my
wine, come and take away my herb.
None of them along the line, know
what any of this is worth.

Toovey really commits to the refrain, DRUMMING along, rocking his torso - eyes closed, biting his lip. On the deck, at the tiller, Spencer is getting visibly short-tempered by this.

As the second verse begins, Toovey shrieks on with the chorus instead.

TOOVEY

Aaaaall along the watch. Tower.
Princess kept the veeeeew.

SPENCER

Toovey!

TOOVEY

While all the wi-meen caaame and
went.

Spencer angrily dials the volume down.

TOOVEY
Barefoot servants, too. Ba-ba-ba-ba-
ba-ba-ba-bum-bum.

SPENCER
Toovey!

TOOVEY
Outside of the school-disco.. a

SPENCER
Toovey!

Toovey stops, puzzled by Spencer's anger, and where his
"backing track" has gone.

TOOVEY
(nasally)
No reason to get excited.

Spencer stares angrily at him, then points ahead.

SPENCER
Cheshunt Lock? You're up.

TOOVEY
Oh.

Toovey collects his arrows together a bit huffily, securing
them in a quiver.

TOOVEY
Best drop me off, then.

EXT. CHESHUNT LOCK - DAY

Another lock typical for the area, this time no cottage, no
bridge. Simply a lock in the green country, on the outskirts
of Greater London. *Just Ducky* has to go down - about a 5'
descent - to continue on their way. The lock is currently set
in her favour, but the gates are all closed.

Toovey capers along the towpath towards the lock, outpacing
the narrowboat in order to reach the upper gates first. He
props a well-looked-after windlass on the beam, and starts to
heave one gate open.

EXT. CHESHUNT LOCK - DAY

Spencer glides *Just Ducky* into the chamber. Toovey closes the
gate again behind her, and paces over to the corresponding
bottom gate, windlass at the ready.

He slots the windlass onto the paddle-gear.

TOOVEY
All good skipper?

Spencer checks behind, to make sure the boat has cleared the cill.

SPENCER
Affirmatron.

And gives a thumbs-up over the THRUM-THRUM and MURMUR of water in the lock.

Toovey begins cranking the paddle-gear - it rises. Water gushes out below the gate. At the more distant top gate there's a sudden THUNK and a strained CREAK. The noise gets both Toovey and Spencer's attention. Toovey halts his cranking. Merely the change in water pressure sealing the upper gates together. The cranking resumes, until the gear will go no farther. Satisfied, Toovey crosses nimbly along the top of the gate.

He hops down to the matching gear, and repeats the cranking operation. The level of water in the lock, already dropping, decreases faster - becoming quite turbulent for a while. *Just Ducky* rocks around and bumps a bit in the chamber.

Cranking finished, Toovey leans back casually on the beam, facing Spencer and the boat; waiting.

TOOVEY
(shouting)
Tunes?

With hesitation, Spencer capitulates - MUSIC back on. He scans around one last time as the narrowboat drops, obscuring his view. He shouts / mimes to Toovey;

SPENCER
Toilet break. Keep an eye open.

And ducks inside.

EXT. CHESHUNT LOCK - DAY

A few minutes having passed, the MUSIC has progressed to a new song. Toovey still relaxes against the beam. His eyes closed, but head bobbing to the beat.

Spencer remains inside *Just Ducky*. The boat itself has dropped the full 5' now.

Without warning, Toovey's beam starts to creep open: making him nearly lose his balance. His eyes shoot open. He pulls the gate back closed, and sidles to the paddle-gear. The windlass is presented to the mechanism and - holding the latch - Toovey gently winds the paddle back down. Again, satisfied, he totters across the closed gates to the towpath.

TOOVEY

You awake down there, skip?

Spencer exits *Just Ducky's* interior, seemingly a little distracted.

SPENCER

Yeah, just having a natter.

He steps back up onto the deck, returning to the tiller, and his usual form.

TOOVEY

Uh-huh.

Toovey sets himself against the beam and begins to lever open that gate. *Just Ducky's* engine note rises.

With the towpath-side gate open, Spencer manoeuvres the boat through as Toovey repeats the process of winding the paddle down. As he passes, Spencer points ahead.

SPENCER

Over there, yeah?

Toovey nods / shrugs; sure, why not?

EXT. "JUST DUCKY" - MOVING - DAY (LATER)

A now familiar, serene, scene. Spencer has been joined on deck by Toovey, who looks restless; bored, even. He openly flicks away now at the bootleg Zippo. Cheap CHING-CHING. He regards the pair of speakers, as if suddenly realising the music ran out some time back. He shrugs, and goes back to fidgeting with his prize. CHING-CHING.

Spencer glances over to him. To it. Shakes his head. SIGHS.

TOOVEY

Hungry?

The question is considered.

SPENCER

Yeah, do us all a bite, will you?

Toovey leans across a locker, noisily sliding the metal lid open. Emblazoned on it an old brass notification sign; "GAS ISOLATION VALVE". Toovey stretches inside to fumble with a bright red cylinder. Finding the valve, he turns the gas on, replaces the lid, and extricates himself.

TOOVEY

Sandwich?

SPENCER

Sure. Whatever we've got.

Toovey ducks inside.

EXT. M25 - DAY

The river runs under a huge, grey-blue, concrete bridge - where a defunct motorway crosses. Though similarly deserted, both bridge and motorway seem a grim blip in the otherwise lush countryside.

Just Ducky approaches mid-channel. The ruins of London loom beyond, electricity pylons lining the way - St Mary Axe outlined faintly on distant horizon.