



Stars of *Eldorado* in after the final episode was screened. L-R Sandra Sandri (Pilar), Faith Kent (Olive), Hilary Crane (Rosemary), Polly Perkins (Trish) and Patricia Brake (Gwen). Photo: PA

in the opening scene – while Drew Lockhead (Campbell Morrison), the Scottish father-of-two, was a raging alcoholic, who would fail to follow the simplest of instructions from his put-upon wife Gwen (Patricia Brake) (“Can you please remember to put the chicken on?”) Snowy White (Patch Connolly), the Irish handyman, who had appeared to have appropriated Fergal Sharkey’s hair, was a dyspraxic simpleton constantly breaking things. It was if the scriptwriters were looking to a cabinet of Toby jugs for inspiration.

One faintly modern character was Drew Lockhead’s teenage son, afforded the somewhat prescient name Blair (Josh Nathan). This was 1992 don’t forget, and this befuddled pony-tailed rave zombie acted as if he was being interviewed outside Fantazia at 6am. In every single scene.

His acting chops ranged from ‘withdrawn’ and ‘languid’ all the way through to ‘comatose’. However, his cheeky wheelchair-bound sister Vanessa, played by Julie Fernandez, was a rare shining light of the show. To give *Eldorado* credit, we hadn’t seen a wheelchair user on a soap since Sandy from *Crossroads*.

The combination of languages, the risible acting and the gossamer-thin plots, were lapped up by student audiences, but it wasn’t rocking the bells for most. One episode revolved around a buffet, hosted by the busybody geriatric Olive (Faith Kent), which was eventually ruined by the hapless Snowy, who upended a silver salver of cheese and crackers.

*Eldorado* was far too light and far too frothy. By comparison, *Neighbours* could have been scripted by David Mamet. Without the side salad of irony, *Eldorado* was a theatrical and cultural airlock.

Now, *Neighbours* and *Home & Away* had led the way, in wowing the Brits with far-off places where the sun actually shone, but even that was missing from many of the winter months in Los Barcos.

There were plenty of overcast scenes shot on cheap plastic furniture as tarpaulin flapped in the wind. It was almost as if the weather was phoning it in. This was a show of pregnant pauses, furrowed brows and the loud marble-walled echoes that bounced around the expensive purpose-built set. *Eldorado* had the air of a porn-film ‘set-up’ only without the physical congress.

Of course, sex was a selling point of *Eldorado*. But even this, they got hopelessly and wretchedly wrong. So wrong. When Bunny Charlson, played by a balding, moustachioed middle-aged man familiar to viewers as a dungeered member of the Rainbow team, Roger

Walker, returns to the ex-pat community from his jaunt to the UK, he has a surprise. A 17-year-old bride.

Bunny’s relationship with Fizz prompted derision from every quarter and rightly so. An early scene of Bunny giving Fizz – his honeymooning bride, remember – the kind of stilted peck on the cheek usually reserved for visits to a hospice, was excruciating. Even the actors knew they were involved in something truly hideous. When the Beeb promised us ‘sun, sex and sangria’ nobody was expecting this kind of filth.

The show did improve a tad, once Corinne Hollingsworth replaced Smith as producer and many of the original cast were jettisoned. Kai Maurer (Dieter), remembers being delivered the ‘Spanish Archer’ with the poetically-constructed: “You won’t be taking any windsurfing lessons this winter.” More followed, including Kathy Pitkin, who played the ironically-named Brummie Fizz.

An amateur whose previous notable credit had been a Level 42 video, it’s hard to recall an actress who struggled so much with the art of acting, and indeed communicating. Everything fell clumsily from her mouth as if she was reading the small print from an insurance application. Fizz was to be the biggest scalp of the fire sale – dispatched in an off-screen death – but it was all too little, too late.

The cast thought *Eldorado* was to be their biggest payday ever when they signed their three-year contracts prior to production. The show had a massive budget, a prime-time slot and masses of hype. “This was my pension,” said the seasoned Campbell Morrison who played sozzled Scot Drew Lockhead. The reality was that each new script delivered to the cast was but more kindling on the out-of-control BBQ that was flame-grilling their careers.

Back then, a success had to be a stone-cold killer, although shows now would kill for *Eldorado*’s figures, which were climbing steadily near the end. However, new BBC1 controller Alan Yentob wasted no time in pulling away the raffia mat almost exactly a year after the show’s launch in July 1993.

The final episode of *Eldorado* played out as the Spanish tried and failed to murder cockney gangster Marcus Tandy, with a car bomb. Even the hosts had had enough.

The European experiment, the impossible dream, had been rejected by the British people. Sound familiar? [Cue flamenco guitar.]

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# BEING DEFINITE ABOUT THE DEFINITE ARTICLE

It is the most common word in English, so how do so many other languages cope without ‘the’?

PETER TRUDGILL explains



The word *the* is far and away the most common word in the English language. Every 20th word produced by English speakers and writers is the definite article.

It is therefore rather difficult for English speakers to imagine how languages can manage without a definite article. But there are many which do. Latin was one such language; and in modern Europe, most of the Slavic languages do not have a definite article either.

Modern European languages can be divided up into three main types based on how definite articles are treated. First, in the east of the continent, there is a large area where the languages simply have no word corresponding to *the*.

The Slavic languages Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, Polish, Czech, and Slovak come into this category. For example, the Czech for *the boy ate the apple* is *chlapec jedl jablko*, ‘boy ate apple’.

You can often tell that these languages don’t have a definite article by listening to their speakers using English: even if their English is very good, they may leave *the* out where we would expect it.

The neighbouring Baltic languages Lithuanian and Latvian also lack a definite article, and so do the Finnic languages Estonian and Finnish.

The Sami (Lappish) languages of northern Scandinavia, too, manage without a word for *the*. So you can travel overland all the way from far northern Scandinavia to the shores of the Black Sea without ever encountering a definite article.

There is also one other region which lacks a word corresponding to *the*.

This lies in the northern part of the former Yugoslavia, where Slovenian, Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian are spoken.

Secondly, there are the languages of southern and western Europe which, like English, have a definite article which is placed before the noun.

This includes the Celtic languages such as Gaelic (e.g. *an ùll*, ‘the apple’); the West Germanic languages like English, German and Dutch (*de appel*); and the western Romance languages, including Spanish, French, and Italian (*la mela*). Hungarian also comes into this category, as do Maltese and Greek (*to milo*).

The third type can be found in two different regions. One lies in the part of the Balkans where Albanian, Bulgarian

## APPLE

In Old English, the word *apple* could refer to any kind of fruit: *finger-apple* meant ‘date’; and *earth-apple* meant ‘cucumber’. Later, in mediaeval English, *apple* was applied to any kind of fruit or nut, except berries. *Apple of paradise* meant ‘banana’; and the original meaning of *pineapple* was ‘pine-cone’.



and Romanian are spoken. Each of these languages has a definite article (even though Bulgarian is a Slavic language), but with the distinguishing feature that the article is placed after the noun. In Romanian, *mar* is ‘apple’ and *marul* is ‘the apple’.

Languages can manage very well without definite articles, but when they do develop them – as Latin did in its transition to Italian and Romanian – articles can end up being placed either before or after the noun.

The other region of this third type, with definite articles after the noun, is Scandinavia, which has the Icelandic, Faroese, Norwegian, Swedish and Danish languages. In Icelandic, *epli* is ‘apple’ and *eplið* is ‘the apple’.

It is a very intriguing fact that the geographical border between the Scandinavian zone, which has ‘apple-the’, and the major western European zone, which has ‘the-apple’, does not run between Germany and Denmark, as you might suppose, but instead passes right through the middle of Denmark.

The dialects of eastern Jutland go with their fellow Scandinavians and place the article after the noun.

But the whole of western and southern Jutland follow Britain and Germany in placing the definite article first.

The Scandinavian word for ‘house’ is *hus*. In Norwegian, Swedish and eastern Danish, ‘the house’ is *huset*, but in a large area of Jutland it is *æ hus*. And likewise, ‘the apple’ is not *æblet* in Jutland, as it is in eastern Danish, but *æ æble*.

Finally, in breaking news, reports are coming in from the north suggesting that both Finnish and Estonian, which currently don’t have a word for ‘the’, are in the process of gradually transferring their allegiance from one language type to another by turning their demonstratives – their words for ‘this’ – into definite articles.

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