



A man with a mustache is looking into an aquarium tank. In the background, another man is visible, wearing a white eye patch and holding a pair of yellow chopsticks in his mouth. The aquarium contains several green plants and a blue object. The scene is dimly lit, with light reflecting off the water surface.

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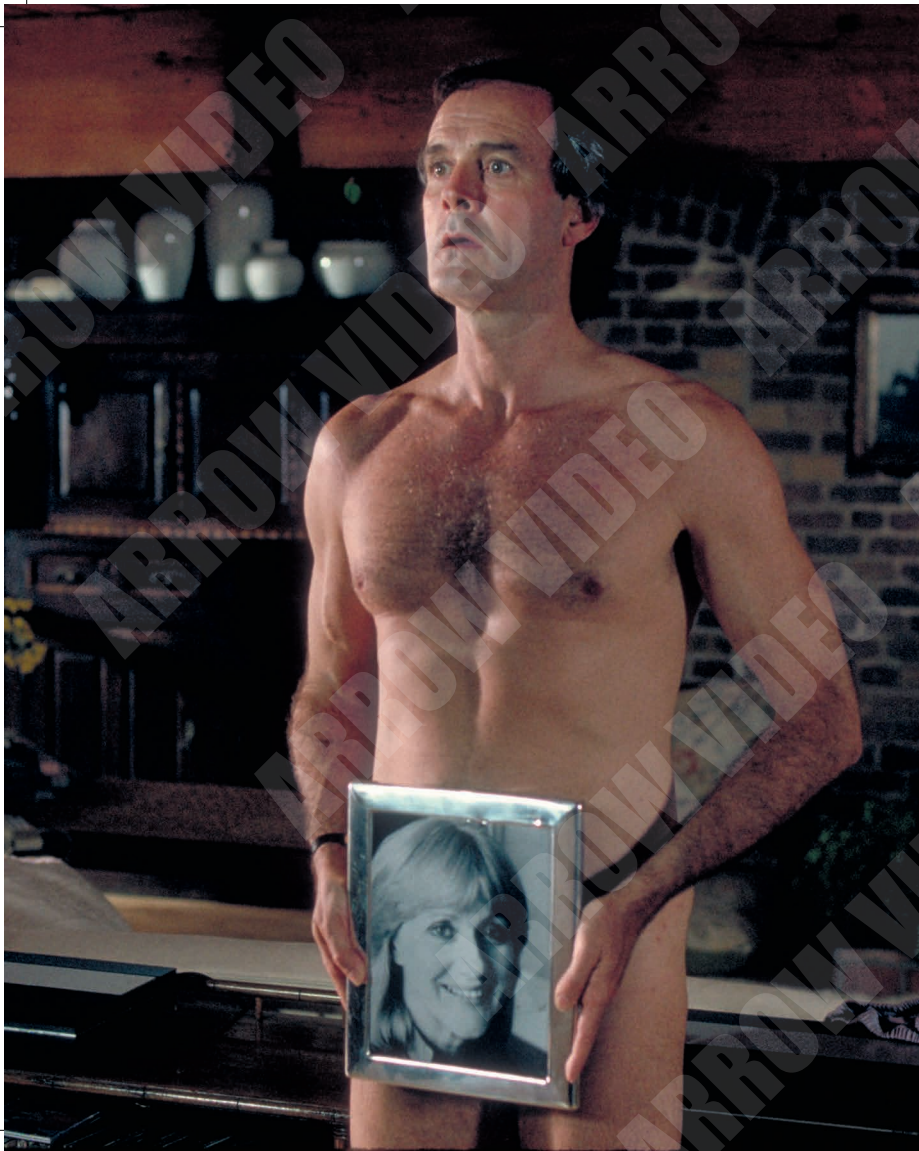
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CAST AND CREW

John Cleese Archie
Jamie Lee Curtis Wanda
Kevin Kline Otto
Michael Palin Ken
Maria Aitken Wendy
Tom Georgeson George
Patricia Hayes Mrs. Coady
Geoffrey Palmer Judge

Music by **John Du Prez**
Production Designer **Roger Murray-Leach**
Director of Photography **Alan Hume** B.S.C.
Film Editor **John Jympson**
Assistant Director **Jonathan Benson**
Associate Producer **John Comfort**
Executive Producers **Steve Abbott** and **John Cleese**
Story by **John Cleese** and **Charles Crichton**
Written by **John Cleese**
Produced by **Michael Shamberg**
Directed by **Charles Crichton**





LAUGHING AND NOT LAUGHING AT A FISH CALLED WANDA

by Sophie Monks Kaufman

You're the vulgarian, you fuck!
Otto

When *A Fish Called Wanda* is good, it is a joy untrammelled. The final film to be directed by Ealing Comedy legend Charles Crichton is a delirious, pacy romantic crime caper, full of meticulously-crafted sequences and quick-fire gags. Defining qualities originate from its writer, star and uncredited co-director, John Cleese, whose ear for human absurdity is at its peak. Kevin Kline and Jamie Lee Curtis give performances that are contenders for the best of their careers – certainly within comedy. Kline was rewarded with that most sumptuous of gongs, an Oscar, receiving the 1989 Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor. This level of recognition reflected the positive mainstream reception for the film when it first came out in 1988. Indeed, *A Fish Called Wanda* would still stand up as a pristine comic creation were it not for missteps into casual homophobia.

Reappraising a film that resides in a glowing nook within the critical consensus is a delicate business that makes one most aware of the lonely subjectivity of personal opinion. In the busy aftermath of a film's initial release, there is an 'anything goes' reaction period. Decades after the fact, casting one's detailed take brings up impossible questions: is there a point to calling out films for errors that may have been caught if they were remade today with the same players? Can we apply our generation's values to films not of this generation? And finally, if a film deviates into social intolerance, even briefly, should it be written off, irrespective of other qualities?

My first encounter with *A Fish Called Wanda* was memorable thanks to something more primal than social consciousness. In my childhood home, television was strictly rationed because "television rots your brain". Exceptions were made to accommodate nature programmes and my mum's taste in comedy. For a woman with a tendency to act severe,



she sure enjoyed silliness. *Fawlty Towers* (1975-79) and *Drop the Dead Donkey* (1990-98) were part of our television timetable. There was even sometimes a rare night of film-watching. My debut viewing of *A Fish Called Wanda* came some time in the late '90s. I remember little of my reaction to the film and everything about my mother howling with delight. It's really something to see a parent in a state of unguarded mirth. My mother's blissful hysteria is lodged in my psyche.

Rewatching now, I trawl for equivalent release, but, instead, ring the differences between my mother's brain and mine. Where she exalted in the comedic highlights, I find myself admiring the internal wiring. The pace and structure of *A Fish Called Wanda* is refined to the point where you can't see the joins. Its 108 minutes whizz by in a zig-zag of polished contrivances. Recapping the plot almost seems beside the point, for the plot is broad and cliché-ridden. The way that *A Fish Called Wanda* distinguishes itself is with narrative clarity that flows scene after scene with never-ending momentum.

From the beginning, no time is wasted. The first 82 seconds introduce the four principal characters, *not to mention* a tank of tropical fish. Cheesy, high-octane music sets a tongue-in-cheek dramatic tone. Four people plot to steal diamonds worth £20 million. Two are English friends – criminal mastermind George (Tom Georgeson) and his loyal animal-loving pal, Ken (Michael Palin). Two are American – George's girlfriend, Wanda (Jamie Lee Curtis), and her alleged brother, Otto (Kevin Kline). Otto is actually Wanda's lover. The break-in goes smoothly (although psychotic Otto can't resist a few crazed acts). The getaway is marred by one witness – a little old woman walking her dogs.

The two Americans grass George up to the police, leading to his arrest. They plan to flee to Rio with the swag. The twist (ain't there always a twist?) is that, before his arrest, George moved the diamonds to a secret location. No one knows where. In a bid to uncover their new location, Wanda tries to seduce George's lawyer, Archie (John Cleese). This makes Otto jealous. A key thing to know about Otto is that he is loco. Not quietly loco. Loco like a spitting Catherine wheel. Another key thing to know is that Wanda is using Otto and is prepared to whack him over the head once she has what she wants.

Curtis carries herself in a man's (film) world with astonishing panache. The actress, Jamie, and the character, Wanda, knowingly subvert male fantasies. Depending on character perspective, Wanda is either a sex object or a femme fatale – physical attributes front and centre. She adopts three personas (with their attendant qualities) – geeky law student, shrill gangster's moll, ruthless mercenary. Never, in any role, does she break a sweat at the work involved in triple-crossing. A wholesome 'aw shucks' grin disarms everyone who doesn't know better. She dashes about with comic precision and seductive calculation. Wanda is

a streak of motion, forever changing clothes and amending her look. She puts on glasses. She removes a sweater. Every action is met by a male reaction, which she pre-emptively, and bases her next move upon. Her poise, adaptability and ability to play male horniness makes her seem in control at all times and her willingness to allow men to *seem* to get the better of her mark her difference to...

...Kline as Otto who is supposed to be role-playing, like his sister/lover Wanda, but doesn't possess the self-control. While she successfully embodies many personas, Otto's comedic flaw is that he can't stop making passionate outbursts. Whenever it would be smart – from the long-game view of getting the loot – to show restraint, he fails immediately, letting emotions tear up the Richter scale. The drama of his personality leads to the film's most farcical scenes. He gets jealous and hangs Archie out of the window. He goes to apologise to Archie for hanging him out of a window and ends up beating him with a gong. His reactive qualities pop up at the moment of stimulus making him as captivating as bee stuck in a bottle. Kline's graceful aggression and relish for yelling is top drawer. We see him becoming enraged when no one is around. Practising an apology: "I'm so very, very sor... FUCK YOU."

Cleese's sense of humour, and focus on concentrated action, provides the exoskeleton for a succession of character-driven conflicts, but it is the American actors layering on the muscle and gloss. What could have been a thoroughly British curio is plumped up by movie-star charisma. Transatlantic casting was, in part, a canny move to appeal to US distributors and cinema-goers and in part an exercise in fan love. Said Cleese of seeing his actors on screen before he had even met them: "I just had this feeling that these people have something that I wanted a part of – that I wanted to take and use." Substantial feelings ran both ways. Curtis had grown up a fan of *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (1969-74): "It made you believe that the possibilities were greater and more outrageous than in LA." There was an offbeat symbiosis between a child of Hollywood and the Minister of Silly Walks.

A by-product of having cultural contrasts weaving through the film was the chance to explore different approaches to passion. Cleese capitalised on this theme in his embodiment of Archie Leach (a nod to Cary Grant's birthname). Archie's eyes are full of yearning. His marriage to perpetually-irked Wendy (Maria Aitken) is sterile and sexless. *A Fish Called Wanda* doesn't stray long in earnest territory, so when Archie makes an outburst about how the English are dead and Wanda is alive, it hits a resounding note. These loud, impulsive, hot-blooded Americans, at least from an outsider's perception, have exoticism. In the first half of the film, two bedtime scenes are cross-cut. Pre-coital Otto and Wanda rip off each other's clothes with sensual flourishes. Archie and Wendy perch at the end of separate twin beds undressing without looking at each other. Otto recites a spiel of Italian, causing Wanda



to moan. Archie trims his nails while Wendy sprays deodorant. This illustration is a beautiful, lean evocation of British repression, but there is a sting in the tail for the Americans too. The words that Wanda orgasmically groans along to happen to include “Benito Mussolini”. These exotic breeds can also be ridiculous.

Ridiculousness always circles back round to seriousness. This quote from Crichton could be plausibly attributed to Cleese: “People think if you’re directing comedy, you’ve got to be funny. On the contrary, you’ve got to be serious.” *A Fish Called Wanda* was two-and-a-half years in the making. Cleese – a busy, unsatisfied, honest, sharply funny man was determined to make it do well, honing and restructuring and polishing. The first character he came up with was Ken and he gave him a stutter, like Palin’s father. Ken is a lightning rod for the film’s nasty streak. His usual function is to be mocked for his speech impediment and his key arc involves accidentally killing dogs, injuring himself emotionally and physically as well. He isn’t given have the same gravitas as the other three principals, yet without his character’s instrumentality, the plot would collapse.

Ken is the one saddled with homophobia. A twice-used ‘bit’ sees Otto contriving to get rid of the other man by pretending to be attracted to him. Ken reliably flees, and on the second occasion is given a piece of dialogue to hammer his gay disgust. Otto says, “Wasting old ladies isn’t nice.” Ken fires back, “Well, it’s better than bugging people.” It’s damning that Cleese gives these lines to his kindest (least selfish) character. In Otto’s mouth, there would have been a case for writing them off as another flaw in a psychopath. From Ken, it scans as a quick one-liner for the quota, one based on the presumption that audiences will relate to gay panic and/or the belief that integrity and homosexuality are mutually exclusive. *A Fish Called Wanda*’s sculpted arcs make it still harder to excuse this lapse. It’s obvious that the film was scrutinised repeatedly, with anything deemed extraneous or inappropriate cut away, and still jabs about homosexuality made the grade.

Weighing down a light film with heavy judgements is a thankless task. You’re the police officer raiding the speakeasy, the neighbour complaining about noise, the customer sending back a cordon bleu meal because of a hair. Weighing social values against other creative qualities is a task in cultural critique. We can choose to say nothing and grit our teeth through the uncomfortable moments and we can choose to articulate the truth that the same social tripwire runs down from oppressive political forces right down to throwaway asides. This isn’t a particularly hilarious or comedy-award-winning line. But then neither are mean-spirited jokes. Yes, the homophobic gaffes in *A Fish Called Wanda* last for a cumulative total of less than five minutes but there is a ripple effect from them. When they happen, *A Fish Called Wanda* stops feeling like an enjoyable film, and starts feeling like a snide expression of prejudice. Private ego sneaks through so much riotous collaboration,

unbalancing the tone of what came before and what comes after. These moments sit like dark bogs amid spry comedy. *A Fish Called Wanda* is finely calibrated so that every element sets up multiple other elements. Thinking about Cleese plotting how to slot gay fear gags into position makes me sad.

What does this mean in summary review? It came into my life on a personal wind and I will re-evaluate it in a similar fashion. I cherish and relish so many moments from *Wanda*. They are a joy to the world and give me a connection to my mother and my past. I smile to think of Kline stampeding around, shooting at nothing, and still somehow pulling off a dashing quality. I suspect that his carryings on set my mum off many moons ago. However, I can’t in good faith recommend *A Fish Called Wanda* without qualifiers. The passing years have drawn attention to baggage that was always there. The baggage isn’t killer. There’s not enough to steamroll the film. Just enough to feel like there’s a dirty stowaway on a clean flight to Rio.

Sophie Monks Kaufman is a freelance film journalist and contributing editor of Little White Lies. She recently made a podcast series that talks about bulimia called Spill Your Guts and her directorial debut, I Do Not Sleep, will emerge soon.





WANDA LUST

by John Morrish

The following interview originally appeared in Time Out n942 (7 September 1988). Reprinted with permission.

John Cleese is to English therapy what Woody Allen is to the orthodox Freudian couch, that is, its most famous customer and occasional propagandist. Allen's recumbent musings turn up on the screen. Cleese's hour-long Thursday afternoon group meetings gave us a book, *Families and How to Survive Them*, co-authored by therapist Robin Skynner, which throws up an important question. If a man's career is apparently based on the public exorcism of his own devils, what happens when the devils are tamed?

Meet Cleese today and it is apparent just how far that therapy process has gone. He has the firm handshake of a military man. He speaks softly and clearly in long paragraphs that suggest that discussing himself, explaining his motives and tracing his drives, is not exactly new to him. He is never impatient. His shoulders are not noticeably hunched, and the muscles in his face never tighten, forcing his eyes to bulge, and his voice never rises much beyond the tones of the concerned professional: "I'm afraid surgical intervention has become necessary," you can imagine him saying, or "I'm afraid it looks increasingly as if we will have to go to court." In short, he's a bit flat, the contemptuousness and bad temper of the young Cleese therapied out, escaping (or did I imagine this?) in his curious wheezing laugh and a few parting remarks about how the SDP had let him down with its bad behaviour and absurd attachment to "paranoid confrontation".

Of course, it's quite wrong to confuse a man and his creations. Quite wrong, and in the case of Cleese, almost irresistible. For never were a man's private seekings after truth quite so public. The man is a walking advert for group therapy, and the characters go with that: look, he seems to say, this is what I used to be.

And, after all, they are hardly a wildly disparate bunch. Men in suits behind desks, men in uniforms, top scientists, the merchant banker who won't contribute on flag day until someone explains what's in it for him. From the Frost days through to Python and then into the Video Arts management training series, they're the same: cold, pompous, bad-tempered. Then there's Basil Fawlty, a more extreme version of the same; cold, pompous,



bad-tempered, snobbish, a man at breaking pitch. Then there are the bit parts: Major Giles Flack in *Privates on Parade*, Stimpson in *Clockwise*, the English sheriff in *Silverado*, all showing the same glacial reserve and incomprehension. Different uniforms, perhaps, but much the same underneath: because one thing Cleese doesn't do is act. He hasn't really needed to – until now.

Catalogue of Grotesques

In *A Fish Called Wanda*, John Cleese plays Archie Leach, a slightly cold, slightly pompous, slightly bad-tempered English barrister who finds himself pursued by gangsters' moll Wanda Gershwitz, another Jamie Lee Curtis tart who turns out, despite herself, to have a heart. And whereas Basil would have thrown himself into paroxysms of desire destined to end in frustration and embarrassment, Archie sheds the pomposity, drops the English reserve, leaves the horrendous wife and daughter in the suburbs, and goes for it. He changes, which makes Archie unique in the Cleese catalogue of grotesques: some serious acting is called for. And yet, there's a little Basil there, isn't there?

"Oh dear," groans Cleese. "Do you really think so? Never mind, never mind."

"What I liked about doing Archie was that to act it was completely different from acting Basil. He's more open, at least when he gets round Jamie: something is ignited inside him. He's more affectionate, more romantic and much softer than any of those other characters..."

Indeed, *Wanda* is part old-fashioned cops-and-robbers caper movie and part romantic comedy, a model brought to mind by the name of Cleese's character. And yet Cleese is no Cary Grant as an actor, nor do the love scenes entirely convince. As a matinee idol, he has some way to go, though middle America seems to have taken him to its heart. The Python films built up a following from the TV series, which was only seen by three percent of the US TV audience; but takings of \$26m in four weeks surpassed all expectations. The romantic Cleese was an unexpected discovery even for the man himself.

"My own character was quite different at the beginning of the film. When we had a read-through, eight months before we started to shoot, I realise I'd written it far too caricatured. He wasn't believable, he was far too pompous and stiff and silly, so the love scenes didn't work. Everybody after that read-through was very clear and very helpful to me about saying, 'Make him more real.'"

"I was then playing a completely different type of character than I'd played before and I was delighted, because I can't tell you how bored I get playing the same thing all the time."

Cleverly Tailored

It could be argued that playing the same thing is a result of writing the same thing all the time. The new film, apart from being cleverly tailored for the American market ("I don't want to spend five years of my life making a movie that won't open in Chicago," he recalls thinking), tries to break that pattern. After thrashing out the plot with Ealing comedy veteran Charles Crichton (responsible for the antique look of much of the film) he sat down and wrote the script himself, trying it out on Curtis and principal villain Kevin Kline before shooting. That makes *Wanda* the first major project Cleese has taken on without a collaborator.

"I find if I work with someone else, I get to the point that I'd never get to on my own. It's like Robin (Skynner) always says, there's a principle in biology that it takes two to make something new. I find that creatively. And it's odd in retrospect to see how often I've created groups. I didn't create the *Frost Report* group, but I was part of the Cambridge Circus group. And then the *I'm Sorry I'll Read That Again* group and then the *1948 Show* group with Marty Feldman and then the Python group and then *Fawlty Towers*, which very much became a group, and then the Video Arts group, which is almost family."

This sounds a little strange from a man who left the Pythons declaring that he'd never be a Frayn or a Stoppard while he was working by committee. "No, it doesn't feel like a compromise at all. I can imagine I might come up with a subject and feel, 'This is appropriate to do on my own.' But I'm very keen always to see how people respond to what I do." That means, for instance, that when we wrote a couple of speeches for a management conference, he sent them to Skynner, to his Video Arts partner Anthony Jay, and to a whole slew of friends and academics, with a request for detailed comments.

It's an unusual diffidence in an artist: but no one should underestimate the self-confidence it takes to be funny. If a man needs a gang around him to sustain him in that, especially when he's trying something new, who can point the finger?

"The problem with comedy is this, that when you write it you laugh, then when you start reading it through, prior to rehearsal, you laugh, and then you may laugh a little bit the first day of the rehearsal and then you don't laugh any more. Now in a weekly comedy thing like *Python* or *Fawlty Towers*, you only have about four or five days while it isn't at all funny before you get the audiences.

"It's terrifying on something like *Wanda*, when I didn't really know if it was funny from the day when I saw down with Charlie to start making notes, which was June '83, to about the



first time that we showed it to an English audience, which was probably October '87. And in between, all you have to do is to trust the fact that you thought it was funny when you first thought of it."

Of course, there are hundreds of people on a film set, and their reactions might help the actors know that things are going the right way. But that can be misleading.

"When you're shooting you sometimes get the feeling early on in the day that it is fairly funny, when you do the master shot with everything together, but once you start breaking up and shooting from all angles you go back on to a kind of memory, almost a muscular memory coming from the stomach, of what rhythm has to be,

"If they're laughing a lot the rest of the day it may well be that you're making the mistake that dear Peter Sellers used to make, which was that he'd change things all the time to make the crew laugh. But of course, the changes were only funny if you knew what they'd changed *from*. A lot of the stuff that gets the crew happy and giggling and on the ball can be irrelevant completely to whether the audience is going to laugh when they see it on screen."

Shoved Into Forms

Some people think that comics are made rather than born, acquiring the skill as a way of making yourself popular, something which Cleeese, "an only child and six foot when I was 12", knew all about. "I spent a lot of time on my own and being quite content to do so, so when I was suddenly shoved into forms of 20 people I had difficulty being accepted. I discovered that I could make them laugh, and I did it without being aware of it, because I liked what happened when I did it.

"Are you interested in sport at all? I used to play a lot of cricket and football, and I've always felt comedy timing is very much like sports timing. On days when you basically feel good and feel confident, your timing is good. You don't snatch at the shot, you don't play defensively, you just hit through it, wait for it. It's very similar. If you go out in front of an audience and your first two or three funny lines don't get a laugh, exactly the same thing happens to a batsman who gets dropped off the third ball or gets beaten comprehensively; the confidence begins to go, the timing begins to go and from then on you're struggling."

Both *Python* and *Fawlty Towers* were recorded in front of a live audience, as has been Cleeese's radio comedy before that. "It's much easier to time comedy off an audience, and that's probably why the best comedies on TV are nearly always done to live audiences. It

gives them a certain edge, a certain tautness, which you don't tend to get if they're done without an audience or worst of all it they're done with canned laughter put on afterwards, which is worst of all, kills it.

"But I think that once you've played comedy in front of an audience for a few years you carry a sense of the audience round somewhere in your solar plexus and that's what you sense your timing off.

"I can still recall saying to Michael Palin in the dressing rooms before we out to record the first show, 'Do you realise, Michael, we may be about to be the first people in history to record a half-hour comedy show in complete silence?' And I really thought it was possible that nobody would get what we were on about at all.

"What we were doing was in those days genuinely new. In a similar way, when *Fawlty Towers* first came out it was on the whole fairly critically reviewed, the first of three weeks. I remember the *Daily Mirror* headline, LONG JOHN SHORT ON JOKES, after the second, because it was again a bit original when it came out. When that happens you often find there's a sort of period when people adjust and take it in. And then if they like it you start to get a chorus of approval."

Squeezing Blackheads

Python was bewildering when it started but largely on a technical level, as a result of the lack of identifiable beginnings and ends to the sketches, rather than the material. Cleeese's material (with Chapman) at that period fell into two categories: authority figures humiliating people or being humiliated themselves, and people being abused with the help of a thesaurus. There was, you will recall, the architect refused permission for his apartment-cum-abattoir block: "Well, of course, this is just the sort of blinkered philistine pig ignorance I've come to expect from you non-creative garbage. You sit there on your loathsome spotty behinds squeezing blackheads, not caring a tinker's cuss for the struggling artist. You excrement, you whining hypocritical toadies..." and so on. Formally, *Fawlty Towers* was standard: the strictly limited set and standard cast, the relationships, the situation. But the originality lay in the grotesque extremity of Basil Fawlty's predicament. He seems to emerge from the pages of some psychiatric textbook, a man on the edge of catastrophic crack-up.

"It's pretty accurate, funnily enough. I wrote it on intuition. It was only later when I had to think about it that I realised that psychiatrically it was very accurate. I remember reading a book on transactional analysis after the first series. It was called *I'm OK, You're OK*; it was



a best seller. And there was a list of characteristic phrases and gestures that people use when they're "stuck in their parent", which is absolutely Basil. If you want to know how to play him, just read that page, it's extraordinary."

He's right. The book lists the following 'parent clues', part of its idiosyncratic division of human drives into parent, adult and child: "Furrowed brow, pursed lips, the pointing index finger, head-wagging, the 'horrified look', foot-tapping, hands on hips, arms folded across chest, wringing hands, tongue-clicking, sighing, patting another on the head." Broadly, these are meant to be clues to tell you when your actions are simply reproducing what your parents told you as a small child. You're not truly adult when you employ such gestures: nor is Basil.

"We always used to start him as calm as possible. The problem with him was he always had to be wound up and Connie (Booth, his first wife, who played Polly) and I felt we were playing God coming up with the story. He always had alternatives at any given moment in a crisis, he could do A, B or C, and whichever he chose was always the worst, but you didn't see that it was the worst for a few seconds until after he'd made the choice. We used to ache for him, we even used to fell, while crying with laughter, 'Oh, poor man.'"

Caught Naked

Archie, too, is humiliated in *A Fish Called Wanda*, being caught naked by a family returning to the falt he has just borrowed as a love nest, being threatened by the thuggish American Otto (played by Kevin Kline, one of Cleese's best friends in real life), standing in a vat of waste diesel oil, being hung upside down out of a window.

Freud would have understood this. "An economy of pity is one of the most frequent sources of humorous pleasure," he remarks in his virtually incomprehensible book on jokes. You don't have to have spent three-and-a-half years with John Cleese in his group therapy sessions to recognise the glee he takes in embarrassment and humiliation, particularly where the victim resembles his former self, the rigid shell from which he has only recently emerged. Where Cleese miscalculates is in inflicting similar treatment on Ken, the animal-loving petty criminal played by a virtually unrecognisable footballer-permed Michael Palin, who is tied to a chair and subjected to a rather arcane torture sequence (Otto shoves chips up his nose and eats his precious collection of fish, including the Wanda of the title) in which his helplessness is exacerbated by the stammer. Even now, it's an uncomfortable scene. As shot, it was significantly longer.

"Much longer and, I thought, hilarious. I had absolutely no problems with it at all. But the extraordinary misjudgement that I made is that Michael Palin created such a sympathetic character in Ken that the fact that he spends an hour trying to kill an old woman and finally runs Kevin over with a steamroller – which are not, by any means, nice things for a young Englishman to do – had no effect at all on the fact that the audience felt so sympathetic towards him that they couldn't take much of his distress at having his fish eaten. We had to cut the scene by 50% from its original length.

"Everybody goes on about the fact that he's got French fried potatoes up his nose and how unpleasant that was and I say to people. 'Do you honestly think having a French friend potato up your nose is that unpleasant?' And somebody said, 'Oh, it's absolutely awful', so I got a French fried potato and stuck it up my nose and said, 'I don't see what's so unpleasant about it.' I said to them then, 'I'll tell you what is unpleasant and that's hanging upside down out of a window five stories up without a safety net.' (That happens to Archie.) But nobody thinks that is unpleasant." This wasn't the only area where Cleese's instincts led him astray. The preview audiences simply couldn't accept the behaviour of Wanda – the woman, not the fish – and again some modification was necessary.

"The audience felt, fairly strongly I England and very strong in America, that Jamie didn't deserve to be on the plane with me at the end. They found it unsatisfactory because she wasn't nice enough. So in February we brought Kevin and Jamie back and it's interesting, I think we must have shot about 75 seconds, that's all it was. It was extraordinary, it just fixed everything. People say, 'Well, the ending's a bit predictable', but they say, 'It was what we wanted.' This is not a profound film, let's be quite clear about it: the only purpose of this film is give people a very happy hour and 45 minutes."

The weakness of the Curtis role has its roots way back in the days when women were people who the Python men dressed up as. "I've always admitted that I don't write very well for women, and I think it's a characteristic of my generation that we don't understand women. In the case of *Fawlty Towers* I wrote it with Connie, very specifically, at the beginning so that she fundamentally would get the female characters right and I would the get male characters right.

"I can honestly say that the thing that interests me most at the moment is trying to understand women better. I notice my relationships with women are getting much better, more open; and it was certainly the case that with that prep school, public school, single-sex upbringing, no sisters, an extraordinary taboo on sexuality of any kind, it took me into my mid-thirties before I began to feel really comfortable with women."



That's a discovery that may or may not bear fruit in future projects: Cleese is talking of a play or film in which he would collaborate with a woman writer who would handle all the scenes in which the female character is alone, while he would do the same for the male character. But it's more of a structural puzzle to explore in idle moments than a real contender. Before that he's doing another psychology book with Robin Skynner, the last having been a great success, and he's taking 18 months off to read all the unread books on his shelves.

And then there's the idea of doing something to interpret the ideas of Norman Cousins, a scientist in the States. "A remarkable man. He's been doing research for ten years at UCLA showing that positive emotions improve the body chemistry. For example, if you laugh for half an hour it improves your immune system," he assures me, and there for a moment are the bulging eyes, the tight facial muscles, the rigid jaw, the waving arms, the impatience of a man who has found something so obviously good and so obviously true that he just has to tell the world about it. Or maybe I just imagined it.





ABOUT THE RESTORATION

A Fish Called Wanda has been exclusively restored for this release by Arrow Films. The film is presented in its original aspect ratio of 1.85:1 with mono and 5.1 audio mixes.

The original 35mm camera negative was scanned in 4K resolution on a pin-registered Northlight Scanner at Pinewood Studios. Picture grading was completed on a DaVinci Resolve. Picture restoration was performed using PFClean software. Thousands of instances of dirt, debris, scratches and other instances of film wear were repaired or removed through a combination of digital restoration tools and techniques. Image stability was also improved.

Restoration Supervised by James White, Arrow Films

Restoration services by Pinewood Studios Group

Jake Chapman, Michael Davis, Lucie Hancock, Jashesh Jhaveri, Rob Langridge, Leigh Reed, Jason Stevens, Jon Mann, Patrick Wilbraham

All original materials were made available for this restoration by MGM

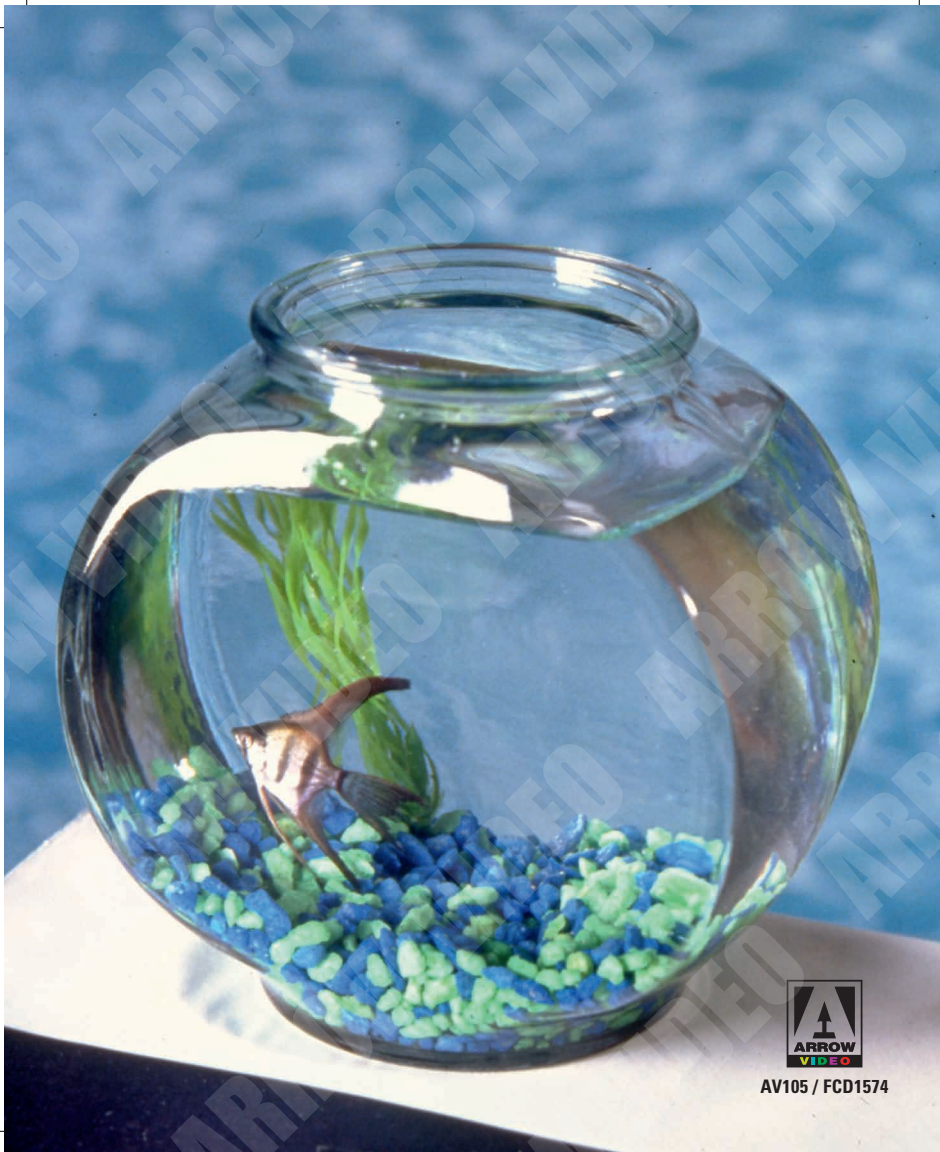
Yvonne Dickens, Scott Grossman

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Discs and Booklet Produced by Anthony Nield
Executive Producers Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni
Technical Producer James White
QC Manager Nora Mehenni
Blu-ray Master David Mackenzie
Design Obviously Creative
Artwork Jacey

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Michael Brooke, Ian Mantgani, James McCabe, Sophie Monks Kaufman,
Roger Murray-Leach, Vic Pratt, Jon Robertson, Louise Stakem



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