

Try that for starters

Last Night's Television

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JAMIE'S MINISTRY OF FOOD

CHANNEL 4

TRUE STORIES: CHOSEN

MORE4

DAWN PORTER: FREE LOVER

CHANNEL 4

"If *School Dinners* was like *Star Wars*," said Jamie Oliver, "then this is going to be like *The Empire Strikes Back*." I couldn't immediately work out the analogy here. Did he mean that **Jamie's Ministry of Food** is the first of a string of increasingly flabby exploitations of a surprise hit? Or was it an acknowledgement that, despite the success of his assault on the Death Star of British eating habits, his enemies had regrouped and forced him into a desperate rearguard action? Either way, he began with an excursion into hostile territory – driving

up to Rotherham in South Yorkshire to confront a woman who last graced our screens, if that's the right word, when she was filmed pushing chips and burgers through a school fence to crap-deprived children. Jamie wasn't exactly complimentary about her at the time, describing her as a "big old scrubber". Now, though, he was going to meet Julie Critchlow face to face and try to enlist her in his culinary-pyramid scheme, an attempt to get a whole town to teach itself how to cook.

It wasn't very long before she and her mum were eating out of his hand. But it was *what* they were eating that really worried Jamie – a virtually unbroken diet of takeaways that was

replicated in almost every household he visited. His solution to this dietary poverty drew on the power of doubling. He taught two people a single recipe on condition that they would each teach it to two more and so on and so on. If everyone kept their word the entire town would be capable of making fresh spaghetti and meatballs in just 15 iterations. Unfortunately, they couldn't or wouldn't. And it wasn't always for lack of will. Natasha, a young

woman determined to improve her children's diet, was ecstatic at her introduction to home cooking, and became Jamie's star pupil but then tearfully lapsed under the pressure of money worries and time. Other participants – one of whom didn't appear to know how to tell when water was boiling – had such a feeble grasp of the skills they'd acquired that they'd dropped them before they got a chance to pass them on.

Julie – one of those Northern women who take pride in the efficiency with that they can stamp on a dream – acquired a told-you-so smirk that understandably infuriated Jamie. Had people like Julie been around when the Wright brothers dreamt of transatlantic air travel, he said, the planes would never have flown: "Don't be ridiculous," he

said, parodying the attitude. "Get on a boat like all the other bastards." So he tried another tack – setting up a shop-front cooking school in a Rotherham high street to try and pass on some basic skills. He's got another three episodes to make an impression, and there'll be those who say that reality television like this – a bit gimmicky, vulnerable to charges of snobbery and exploitation – is no way to do it. But they're Julies at heart, I think. They miss that he really means it, and how much it would mean if he's even a 10th as successful as he aims to be.

Brian Woods's sad, involving documentary **Chosen**, broadcast in the *True Stories* strand, left you feeling that no photograph can be trusted, and particularly not school photographs. His film was constructed from three long interviews with men who had been abused at the same British boarding school, and it repeatedly contrasted their

memories of sexual assault with pictures of themselves as children, apparently innocent and in most cases



untroubled. Occasionally, as the rostrum camera panned across a row of boys to close in on one face, you found yourself wondering how many other children there had secrets too. It was a film edited to preserve long, struggling pauses, as grown men chewed their lip and nerved themselves to speak. But when they did it was with a careful, nuanced clarity that precisely described the coils of guilt and imagined complicity that tightened around them at the time. The alleged chief perpetrator never came to trial after the case was stayed on grounds of “abuse of process”, the argument being that he couldn’t receive a fair trial so many years after the events in question. But he got a kind of trial here and the verdict was damning. When he retired he gave a speech in which he talked of how he would miss the boys and “their many fine qualities, which have often brightened my day”. He’d darkened years and years himself.

In **Dawn Porter: Free Lover**, the presenter went off to investigate polyamory and open relationships, notionally an exploration of her own attitudes but actually a way of getting a very attractive woman into as many sexually titillating situations as possible. It turns out there is free love out there, but you pay a terrible price in pony-tails and new-age bullshit to get access to it.



A man for all seasonings: in ‘Jamie’s Ministry of Food’, the chef tries to help people cook healthier food

