

# Getting Frisky With Lt Dangle

Stand by for the funniest new comedy on television – *Reno 911*. Tom Lennon stars as man-hungry cop, Lieutenant Dangle. He talks to Matthew Myers about playing gay, getting snubbed by the cast of *Friends*, and busting out of those shorts!



*Reno 911* is a surprise package – and so are Lieutenant Dangle's shorts! The show is a low-budget, improvised comedy that takes the piss out of reality cop shows like *Cops* and *Bad Boys*. Handheld cameras accompany a squad of dubious characters in police uniforms on their rounds. Among the seven deputies of the Reno Sheriff's department are a slutty ex-stripper, a sexually frustrated racist and Lieutenant Dangle – the straight-laced but oh-so-randy gay member of the team.

**DNA:** You play Lieutenant Dangle as a straight-talking professional, yet from the first episode we see that he's actually a man-hungry flirt!

**Tom Lennon:** Exactly! But when I talk to magazines like *Entertainment Weekly*, they ask, "So, is Dangle, like, maybe closeted and on the fence?" It always baffles me because in the very first episode I have a two-minute make-out scene with another guy. Where do they think the closeted part comes in?

**You're straight in real life. Do you get inspiration for Dangle from gay friends?**

Not really. So many of the gay characters on American TV are used like a punch line. They are always very flamboyant and usually effeminate. But there are all kinds of gay men, including macho, and I consider Dangle to be a very tough guy – except for the shorts! In my head, I'm playing him like Steve McQueen in *Bullet*. I didn't want to play a caricature. But, I bet people who haven't seen the show and saw a picture of me would think I was playing a stereotype.

**Dangle is very straight acting but does outrageous things without batting an eyelid.** I think that's the best way to play it. Very straight, no pun intended!

**Tell us about Dangle's trademark shorts.**

It's funny because I got the idea for the shorts from the Demi Moore movie *GI Jane*. The navy seals wear shorts that are at least as short as Dangle's, if not shorter. Though they may not be quite as tight. My shorts are actually stripper shorts that you can buy here in Hollywood. I believe they are for female strippers though. Dangle looks like Viggo Mortensen in *GI Jane*, who couldn't be any tougher, but he's really just about to pop out of those shorts!

**Where did the inspiration for *Reno 911* come from?**

We came up with the idea when we were working for the Fox Network who, of course, also makes *Cops*. We were working on a sketch show and Fox suddenly pulled the plug before we were to shoot, and we still had a budget and a cast, but no show. So we thought, "What if we just improvise a show as we go along?"

Since we were doing it for Fox, we decided to do it in a format that would fit their channel. *Cops* has been on Fox for 15 years. We thought it would be a perfect fit if we improvised being cops, driving around, jumping on people, handcuffing them and stuff like that. So we filmed it in about three or four days, edited it, turned it in – and never heard from them again! Comedy Central were gracious enough to buy it.

[Deputy Travis Junior] and we've known each other since we were 18. We took our comedy group to MTV and did a show that ran for a few years called *The State*. It was like a *Monty Python* sketch show. Then the three of us did another show together for Comedy Central called *Viva Variety*. The concept of that was to create a fictional European variety show as though Comedy Central had just bought the rights to a show that had been on in Belgium

France with Naomi playing her brother in *Le Divorce*. She's a wonderful person, very sweet, funny and a fabulous actress.

**You also had a guest spot as Randall on the Las Vegas episode of *Friends*.**

I did two episodes of *Friends*. I was there for two full weeks and I never met Jennifer Aniston, Courteney Cox or David Schwimmer. I met the others, but I'd be sitting at a table next to Jennifer, David and Courteney and no one ever said hello. But I was only there for about two weeks, every day for ten hours. There was never really time for them to say hi!

**Is Danny DeVito an executive producer on *Reno 911*?**

He is, and he makes an appearance in the second season.

**What do you think attracts gay audiences to left-of-centre comedies like *Reno 911*, *Strangers With Candy* or *The League Of Gentlemen*?**

What they have in common is that they're outside the predictable sitcom genre, where there is usually a laugh track. Gay audiences are slightly more sophisticated and don't need to be told when to laugh.

Also, I think the tone of these shows is much edgier than network television in America, where the standard is very tame. Most of the shows on the air here are versions of *The Honeymooners*, which is one of the first ever TV shows.

The racial stuff is very edgy in our show and we don't try to be racy just for the sake of it. We don't cut anything out. If it's funny, it stays in regardless of being off-colour or suggestive. In fact, we make sure we put some in!

**Has the show been nominated for a GLAAD media award?**

Yes, it was. GLAAD is the Gay and Lesbian

**"Dangle looks exactly like Viggo Mortensen in *GI Jane*... except he's just about to pop out of those shorts!"**



**Is Reno a real place?**

Yes, it's a pretty rough town. Nevada has legalised prostitution, brothels and gambling. But Reno itself is a very small town. It's fairly isolated, up in the High Sierra mountains. It's a very small town with big city dangers like hookers and weird casinos.

**Does the 911 part have any significance to September 11?**

No, 911 is the emergency telephone number here in the States. It doesn't have anything to do with the Twin Towers attack. We thought about changing the title but decided not to.

**Is it true you film in a real police station?**

We do. In fact, one of the extras is an actual

for ten years. So we had weird accents, variety acts and showgirls.

**On the internet, teenage girls discussed how talented and handsome you are.**

Yeah, isn't that interesting? I hoped that Dangle would go over well with the gay community and so far so good, but the weird thing is that women, and young girls in particular, have a crush on him.

**One girl claims she can see your nuts in the show's opening sequence!**

There are many people who have said that. I didn't see the show much after we edited it. Maybe you can. I've had people in the cast tell me they are certain you can see them.

**The other outstanding character is Jackie, the pickle-throwing hooker who Deputy Garcia describes as "a human pile of garbage that would make Satan weep!"**

Unfortunately, Jackie is not as popular as I hoped she would be. I'm a big fan of Jackie and feel she is one of the most authentic characters in the show. She makes a couple more appearances throughout the first season, but she doesn't appear in the second season. I think the network is not so hot on Jackie.

**As an actor, you've also worked with Australians, Guy Pearce and Naomi Watts.**

I only had a short scene in *Memento* so I only spent one day with Guy but I remember thinking, "My God, how does he stay that skinny!" Then I spent about six weeks in

Alliance Against Defamation. We didn't win it though. We lost to *Will And Grace* which has won about four times in a row.

**What can we expect from Dangle in upcoming episodes?**

Oh, I do some very exciting undercover work! There is a festival here called the Burning Man Festival, which is a huge event in the desert near Reno. People paint their bodies, take LSD and build sculptures out of garbage and stuff. We go undercover to try and make some arrests and I wear thigh-high leather boots, a G-string, devil wings and a trident. I won't say how it turns out, but it doesn't work out well for us! 🍊

*Reno 911* starts this month on The Comedy Channel.

**"The weird thing is that women, and young girls in particular, have a crush on him."**

Los Angeles County Sheriff, and they are open for business! We don't shoot after hours either, so people are being arrested all day and they go running out on calls. It's a lot of fun. I've had several cops tell me they think Reno is the most accurate cop show on television.

**How have gay people taken to Lieutenant Dangle?**

He's a pretty big hit over here. There were a lot of Dangles this Halloween season. It became a popular costume. I was also invited to be in the gay pride parade this year. So, yeah, he's pretty popular in a cult kind of way.

**When did you get your break in comedy?**  
I was in a college comedy group at NYU with fellow cast-members Kerri Kenney [who plays Deputy Trudy Wiegel] and Ben Garant