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Sure, They Sound Funny. After All, They're British.

The secret of "The Secret Show," a new animated series whose third episode will be shown on the Nicktoons Network tonight, is that it's a British production. The British may not be

TELEVISION REVIEW

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funnier than we are, but they clearly have a corner on infantile silliness. An American cartoon character called Nanny Poo Poo would be merely vulgar; with a British accent, Nanny Poo Poo is perfect.

Ms. Poo Poo is the chief evildoer in one of the two back-to-back cartoons that make up tonight's episode. Her mission is world domination; her weapon is the "Baby-Izer," a pump-action weapon that plugs its victims' mouths with pacifiers and instantly turns them into mewling tots.

Ms. Poo Poo, who looks like a cross between Judi Dench and Mussolini, trains her army of drooling recruits at baby boot camp. "Soon my babies shall grab the World Leader, and then I shall be nanny to the world!" she bellows. It is difficult not to think of "Supernanny" at this point.

The cartoon culminates in a pitched battle between the Baby-Izer and the Baby Burpulator, a giant, airborne bottle that shoots formula at the infants, causing them to burp, which turns them back into adults. (The connection between belching and maturity, again, seems distinctly British.) Children may enjoy this hilarious battle, but most of "Secret" is so sly that its best jokes will sail, like the Burpulator, right over the heads of its intended audience.

Often TV shows are only as good as their villains, but "Secret" has decent heroes as well: a motley crew of crime fighters led by Changed Daily, a David Niven (or David Spade) priss. For security reasons, he gets a

The Secret Show

Nicktoons, Saturday nights at 8:30, Eastern and Pacific times; 7:30, Central time.

Commissioned by the BBC and produced by Collingwood O'Hare Entertainment.

new name every day. The gimmick works because the names (Lamby Wammikins, Warty Fingleblaster) are funny.

The forces of good also include a pair of bland teenage agents who look like cousins of Mad magazine's "Spy vs. Spy" comic strip characters. They have British accents and charm, but not much internal life. It's as if these animated characters trained at the Royal Shakespeare Company instead of the Actors Studio.

"Secret" is full of retro visuals and wonderful jokes: a riff on the Trojan Horse, an epidemic of people being attacked by their bad toupees. In an earlier episode, demented Martians stole Earth's gravity so they could have "falling-down parties" on their planet. Back on Earth, entire countries were pulled loose from their moorings. Imagine Switzerland floating through the air — yodelers, goats and all.

The only thing that doesn't quite work about "Secret" is the conceit from which it derives its title. Every opening segment features a "sweet little granny" hosting a puerile entertainment called "The Fluffy Bunny Show." Secret agents give her the hook and start broadcasting "The Secret Show." This gets old, but even before it does, it requires us to suspend our sense of disbelief twice. That's too much work for any cartoon, even one this good.