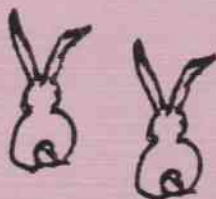


Terry & Susie



RABBITEARS

A Fanzine of Television Commentary

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Glossary of Fannish Terms

fan	science fiction fan; pl. fans or fen
fannish	pertaining to science fiction fandom
fandom	the vast & loose community of science fiction fans
fanzine	fan publication virtually always distributed free of charge and not necessarily containing any mention of sf
sf, f/sf	science fiction, fantasy/science fiction
loc	letter of comment; pl. locs or lox
loccol	letter of comment column
egoboo	praise, notice, usually via lox; short for "ego boost"
con	science fiction convention
fan magazine	commercial publication featuring photos of media stars
sci fi	term that affects many fans the way "Frisco" affects San Franciscans
skiffy	fannish alternative pronunciation of "sci fi"; affectionate connotation
thish	this issue
h	the extraneous aspirate can connote reverence ("bheer") or its opposite ("ghod")
ghu	a deity of the fannish pantheon
FIAWOL	Fandom Is A Way Of Life
evial	evil as envisioned in silent-movie melodrama
Bellona	mythic, archetypal American city in Samuel R. Delany's novel <u>Dhalgren</u>
L11	an enslaved race in Samuel R. Delany's novel <u>Empire Star</u>

The Female Man -- novel by Joanna Russ

The Silver Metal Lover -- novel by Tanith Lee

RABBITEARS

-- Don't be mean. We don't have to be mean.

'Cause remember... No matter where you go...

...there you are.

-- Buckaroo Banzai

Some will have divined that in my rule against Vegematic reviewing last ish I was partly just trying to Stop Myself Before I Kill Again. It's true. There were enough leakages -- in the columns and in my attitude toward "factual" tv -- to give me away, and I fear this time I may even have transgressed my own one-snipe-per-10-manuscript-pages guideline in an article. But the rule stays. It's okay to attack a system, or even a genre, as long as you do it consciously -- but no trashing individual shows, or performers, unless you can convince me they are really morally reprehensible. Critique, yes. Napalming, no. This way I plan to keep RABBITEARS a Weedeater-free zone where anyone can write about whatever shows they want without fear of being dumped on for their tastes, and at the same time I can -- vary my own tendencies toward slash-and-burn criticism.

And as long as I'm feeling confessional:

People say tv is a drug, but for me books were. For three decades of my life I used books to hide in, float away on. One year, travelling in Europe (back then the guide-book was still Europe on \$5 a Day; in my circles that would have been considered the lifestyle of a wastrel and a spendthrift) I learned what it meant to me to be without books. I had my first and hopefully last anxiety attack. When we backpack types would meet, on the Spanish Steps, in the Valencia youth hostel, at the Sleep-In or the free territory -- free of laws, that is, a mind-boggling social experiment -- called Christiania in Copenhagen, we'd swap paperbacks -- thick things like The Glass Bead Game or Middlemarch. I came close to trading my virtue for print, in the form of The French Lieutenant's Woman, incidentally the only book I ever read straight through and then turned right back to the first page and read again, so desperate was I for my fix. I tracked down English language lending libraries in towns where residents and tourists alike swore there was no such thing as a lending library, let alone an English one. Yet like all junkies, it never occurred to me I was an addict; I just liked to read. It was only later, when the colossal sexism, classism, racism, you name it of Literature had hounded me through science fiction to an exclusive use of mysteries, that I noticed the alarm I felt each time my paperback stock-pile dwindled.

It was my stash.

I had spent my life spaced on other people's dreams, a shocking thing to look back on.

So when I hear some supercilious bullshit about the horrors of kids strung out on box rather than doing wholesome stuff like reading, it sounds pretty much to

me like a lush deploring the crack epidemic.

I know. I've been there. If you're reading this, you've probably been there too.

My name is Mog Decarnin, and I'm a bookaholic.

So. The novel is popularly regarded as THE serious literary form, right? 400 years ago it didn't exist. Motion picture art developed faster because it based itself on the example of the novel. (This idea just here/now hatched, that the novel rather than the play was the model for the flix. Don't know why but it feels true.) Movies and tv discovered certain esthetic principles very fast because of the novel's groundbreaking work, then abandoned them much as the paperback explosion trashed and buried the novel, for the same reason, people's need to stop thinking because their lives were being destroyed by greedy schmucks like those producing the lousy books and films. But though swamped in shit, the motion picture is our art form, we the 20th Cent invented it it is ours. By 1800 Jane Austen was already tweaking posers who snubbed "the trash with which the press now groans" -- an enthusiastic addict of trashy gothics, though herself the purest of all writers of English-language fiction, she knew that junk will sink like bones at LaBrea, the critics' cement overshoes are unnecessary; it's the good stuff that needs us, what perishes for lack of a little CPR each generation -- artists as well as their work go down in the awful tar of our silence, often our ignorance (quick, name three really cool Latina writers).

True, the junk contributes to that silence -- studios and networks pay to place reviews, which of course bumps reviews of non-payola works; never mind the distribution system choked with monied rubbish, and the throes of funding motion picture projects in the first place. But this can hardly be called a fault of the medium when the problem so obviously lies in our deep national psyche -- economics is the collective unconscious.

In form, television is not newfangled. Some old drama forms (Punch and Judy shows spring to mind) even prefigured the series, in using familiar characters over and over in new plots -- an ingenious device that saved time in characterization and let you get on with a story. "The Gods" were essentially such a group of characters -- our only contribution was dreaming up a more modern rationale for the way exciting, unusual things keep happening to the same set of people -- the "adventurous" series premise, e.g., the cop show (detectives, reporters, rescuers). The hot new concept of basing "specials" on real life news stories was old hat to Greek poets and playwrights in 500 B.C.

Complaining of tv's sensationalism, people often don't stop to differentiate between premise and treatment. The point of fiction, surely, is that it is more interesting than real life; otherwise, why take time off from real life to read or watch? That "great" fiction should approach as close as possible to the boredom of life in the quasi-extinct lane is a recent notion with, I hope, the life-expectancy of the hula-hoop. "Great" fictions of the past have all been totally wild-eyed in premise and peopled by war-heroes, royalty, the mad, folk in highly agitated states of romance, and if possible all four rolled into a single character. Tv hasn't modified this a whole hell of a lot, and why should it? Ed doesn't know his wife Jo is really his mother, or the guy he killed in a bar brawl actually happened to be his long-lost father, Lance -- is this Sophocles or General Hospital? The patriot fighting his way home through monsters and witches, more of that sci-fi stuff -- if it isn't The Odyssey. There once was a king who had three daughters -- Shirley Temple's Storybook or King Lear? No matter how hackneyed or how improbable, the plots and premises of great literature get away with it, because they're just s'darn well done. "Realism" just wasn't an issue for these writers, though believability certainly was, and part of making a story believable lay in making it so interesting you never stopped to say "Aw, that couldn't really happen..." This is part of the reason why, paradoxically, the closer you come to "realism", the harder it is to achieve believability. Besides, in realism everyone's a critic. They've been to Akron, Ohio, and it just wasn't like that.

Anyway, this is another swat at explaining why premise to me is less relevant than treatment, in the way I look at tv shows.

For instance:

I thought I'd written myself out (and then some, I hear readers mutter) on the subject of 21 Jump Street last issue. But since the show cell-divided I've had a lot of reactions and instead of limiting myself to a decorous "I told you so" I've sprawled out into all kinds of alleys about Booker, episode micro-reviews, Johnny Depp's roles, image... Perfervism strikes again.

To see a show self-destruct week after week like that slow-motion A-bomb mushroom in which you see, at the end, the face of the devil, is to see the devil in the flesh of Hollywood; grief, distrust, suicidal boredom, guilt and self-loathing proliferate filmic Product like trash in the streets of a ghetto; for the same reasons. The limits of the glittering ghetto are strict; they're walls made of money. Bales and slabs and sandbags of loot, abutting walls of solid South African diamond, Chilean emerald, and opium, wall of dreams; moats of oil; everything tradeable for cash or credit; pure electricity, water, guns, and stacks of the Bomb itself.

21 Jump Street sponsored in part by the U.S. Armed Forces, Cher (remember Flower Power, if I could turn back time a minute here?) half nekkid on the U.S.S. Missouri, Arsenio Hall, who was arrested at Kent State, cheering the U.S. invasion of Panama. Just the kind of heavy irony you learn to live with.

What I, at least, don't learn to live with is the destruction the ghettoization wreaks. Art dribbling into sludge. The structure of artistic resistance disrupted by lack of praise; fear; blunt plow-through of economic dozers; sheer weight of surrounding stupidity. Some one or all of these happened to 21 Jump Street. And torn apart at the crotch to leave two one-legged shows, it could hardly be expected to recover real equipoise. There were good moments, but the cultural prejudice against tv's pretty boys can only be reinforced if the show goes on sinking -- especially as a couple of Jump Street clone attempts've sprouted this spring.

I encountered one unexpected reflection of the attitude even in the Cannell public relations office. Ask them anything about the show itself and they answer kindly and helpfully, as is a PR person's wont; mention the name Johnny Depp, though, and a note of impatience creeps in -- you get the feeling you've just been tagged as a phone freak, a third your actual age, a quarter your actual I.Q., and a waste of a busy person's time.

After last ish, a few people instantly adopted "peach fuzz" as their term for male starlets. This never even crossed my mind, I swear -- I only meant it as a pun on the idea of young cops, an interpretation that passed completely over the heads, or beneath the notice, of these readers. I really did want to leave that linguistic gap alone, but it looks like language abhors a vacuum.

Television Fandom

Scratch any subject, honest to Pete you'll find a fandom under it. Already I've tripped over a vast network of video hoarders, video review zines, The TV Collector (a fascinating little bi-monthly from Stephen and Diane Albert -- \$15 a year, Box 188, Needham, MA 02192) and a brisk market in tapes and memorabilia of shows like The Rebel, Hawaiian Eye, and Oh Susanna! Remember Daktari? Whirlybirds? Any show you can think of, someone out there's collecting it.

Stephanie

Collect this RABBITEARS, 'cause it features the first appearance in any fanzine of Stephanie H. Piro, author of Blank Tapes and mastermind behind the infamous t-shirt/sweatshirt/nightshirt collection "Strip T's". (Comic Relief, the commercial magazine about cartooning, beat me out by featuring Piro in their March 1990 issue.) In addition to several of her Strip-T's cartoons, you'll find here strips from "The Terrible Teatime", of which Piro explains, "The premise was 2 women who live together, who may or may not be related, they have a maid who is never seen, but is referred to, a cat, 2 male friends and lots of action -- so to speak --" She adds that she had many positive rejection letters, including one from the Village Voice in '86 saying the Voice wouldn't be ready for her strip till 1996. Fandom once again rides ahead of the wave. You can get a Strip T's catalog for free or a post-paid copy of the

cartoon "novel" Blank Tapes: A Modern Woman's Story (You'll love it. Trust me.) for \$6.50 from her at PO Box 522, Alton, NH 03809.

Innovations

I'm glad to have more new voices this time, but there's still an awful lot of me, so to make things more participatory, when it seems like I may be assuming too much, I'll ask for a show of hands. What could be fairer than that?

Also, RABBITEARS is pleased to announce the first annual or even oftener Golden Glop Awards. Selected by a panel of experts who prefer to be known only as The Editorial We, the Golden Glop winners will be proclaimed here and there around the zine.

ERROR! ERROR! ERROR!

The mind -- a wonderful and mysterious thing. It transposes translates transforms experience -- in other words, it screws up.

Last issue's synaptic whimsey included an excruciating Freudian typo, misspelling of "Sapir", and the imposition of that memorable 21 Jump Street line about Klinger onto the snowy overriding image of "A.W.O.L.": in fact, the line occurs not while Penhall and Hanson slog winter mountains, but as they stand in line for yearbook photos.

When I saw the rerun I sank down slowly into the bedclothes. *aaieeegh* I hate making mistakes, hate hate hate hate ow eeee augh. Of course since I hate it so much I hardly ever do it, you understand. These few little faux pas are virtually the only errors -- aside from the Invisible Typos I'm still finding -- in RABBITEARS 1. Okay, well, the phone number in the colophon was not, in the strictest sense of the word, mine -- that is to say, dialing it would have connected you not so much with my apartment as with the office of the Dean of the School of Management at the University of Minnesota BUT I CAN EXPLAIN! IT COULD HAVE HAPPENED TO ANYONE! The prefix was the prefix of my work number -- while the rest is, yes, from my realio trulio own home number. I just must've typed it during a mental tectonic shift, or identity crisis or something. Or...subconsciously I didn't want any of those nonfannish strangers calling up with effusive appreciation of my critique. *cough.* The modesty of critics being legend.

My first inkling of aught amiss came when the famed Susan Crites rang in her accustomed good cheer.

"You probably already know this," she carolled, "but your phone number in RABBITEARS is wrong."

"What do you mean," I blanched, "'wrong'?"

"I kept calling it in the evening and nobody answered, so I checked." Gay laugh. "Your prefix is 874, not 625."

"Augh," I said with an horrible awareness. Augh." Then, "So whose number...?"

The young man at the Dean's office took down my name and real phone number. But no one called after that. At least, not during office hours.



More and more people I know are moving onto the street to protest homelessness, rising rent and condo costs.

I look out my window, and see several people from my unit. They are singing the theme song to "Flipper". Such harmony! Such Bravado! I want to toss down my digital remotes and join them! But, I remember the colorized version of "Gunga Din" is on tonight . . .

from Blank Tapes

Written word being the traditional fannish medium, a paucity of phonecalls didn't mean the editorial we sat alone in a darkened room, wan and egobooless. If writing is going the way of the auk, fanzines will be its last nesting ground. Here, then, are writings of our readers in response to this visual medium whose own secret core is, actually, written:



"With friends like these, who needs hallucinations?"

John Astin on Night Court

Walt Willis (Northern Ireland) Thanks for RABBITEARS #1. I come to it as a voice from both past and future, as you do to me, I have not yet seen many of the programs you mention, and some of those I am watching now may be prominent in your future.

To some extent this situation makes it difficult to comment on RABBITEARS. However, your general remarks at the beginning are a help in analysing my impressions of American series. I have seen many that seemed promising, like Cheers, Taxi, LA Law, Hill Street Blues and many others, but sooner or later I have given them up when they seemed to me to be getting threadbare and desperate. It may be unfair but a bad program seemed to spoil all the previous good ones, like soap in a stew. I used to think this was because American tv tended to run series into the ground, whereas it was the policy of the BBC to take a show off at the height of its popularity; so I was subconsciously convinced that when a bad program came along in an American series, it was the beginning of the end. But reading your editorial it occurs to me that there may be another reason, namely that the number of people involved in an American series is greater than in Britain. It stands to reason that such a fruit machine of talent must occasionally throw up a row of lemons. The conclusion that I should have kept watching is borne out by the fact that a more recent Cheers had a really funny line from John Cleese, in the role of a snooty Englishman. When Rhea Perlman makes a pass at him he says "Have her washed and taken to my tent." At the time I was perhaps too inclined to assume that this was one of those attempts that fading shows make to restore inspiration by importing guest talents, like King David and the virgins.

My own favourite series has been Yes, Minister, partly because I was for some years a Humphrey Appleby figure and I appreciate its pinpoint accuracy. Moreover it does not attempt to engage the emotions in the way that some equally well crafted British comedy series tend to do. I stopped watching Steptoe and Son because I don't like being got at in that way, and even some installments of Fawlty Towers seem to me too sad to enjoy.

I would advise you to look out for Red Dwarf III, starting here next week. In Radio Times the producer comments: "Some adults have problems with it. Some people have trouble tying their shoelaces."

Candi Strecker Terry Garey's piece is one I can ruefully identify with -- most weekends I absorb several hours of building and cooking shows off KQED. I especially love the cooking lore, I'm a moderate cook but NEVER take a



recipe or a concept straight off of these shows and use it myself. It's just mysteriously comforting to put these shows on.

Loved your piece on the secret anarchy of The A-Team. A classic example of a show that "everyone knows" is evil and stupid, but then you watch it and discover that that's not what's going on at all. Did you see the movie Fat Man and Little Boy in which Dwight Schultz got to play Robert Oppenheimer? Really bold casting on the part of whoever thought to put a tv actor, superficially known for playing a goofball, into such a serious historical role. I don't think the movie had quite enough room for either the Oppenheimer character or for Schultz to play him, though -- it had so much of a political agenda, and so much historical and technical background to deliver, that the whole thing just didn't jell. I wanted to interject a great quote I once read in The Village Voice -- the guy said something to the effect that he'd rather have his kids watch The A-Team than Hill Street Blues, because the message of Hill Street is that we should sit back and leave everything in the hands of the cops because they're sensitive people just like us, while the message of The A-Team is -- take your problems into your own hands.

Now the part I really have trouble putting into words, my reaction to your piece "Peach Fuzz". It's a good read, it's a good example of your new school of thought, perfervism, and in its course makes a lot of interesting points -- I was very much struck with your aside observation that while the sponsors are the very reason-for-being of a tv show, they are quickly forgotten, while the show and its characters may go on to a certain (wow!) immortality. The concept you develop in the course of the essay, that there just isn't an acknowledgement of beautiful boy starlets, is an important one and a good one. (This is something Cheryl ((Cline)) has done a great job of exploring in rock music -- the idea that rockers men like are "serious artists", but rockers women like are "teenybopper idols".) But the one thing your article failed to do is...make me want to watch 21 Jump Street. I dunno, I can intellectually understand your passion for the show, but I still cringe every time I see one of Fox's promo trailers. The shock-assault of MTV imagery...the mousse (I can't get it straight whether "DEPP" is the actor's name, the character's name, or the brand of hairgunk he uses)...the very thought of subjecting myself to a cop show, any cop show...no, I just cannot suspend my disbelief. It's not my cup of meat (Beefcake, in this case. Or shall we say vealcake??) But why do I feel like I have to be terribly apologetic about it? Maybe that's an intrinsic problem with perfervist criticism -- that the writer's passion shows thru so nakedly that the reader feels a kind of obligation to share it. And that's ridiculous -- I mean, I surely doubt that your intention was to "make every reader a fan of 21 Jump Street or else the piece is a failure". You gave me something to think about, made me pay attention to something I would otherwise have given no serious thought to -- that's got to be the only valid measure of the piece's success.

By the way, I was very intrigued by your concept of the White Flash on television.

Now that it's been pointed out to me I notice it all the time, especially on MTV. I hate all kinds of strobes -- they always make me feel like I've been bodily invaded.

((Darn! Didn't know Dwight Schultz was in that or I would've tried harder to see it. You're absolutely right about "Peach Fuzz" -- I wasn't trying to motivate anyone to watch Jump Street. Readers are under no obligation to buy when it comes to my passions -- see the next Letter.))

Melody Clark Your publication's perspective reminds me very much of that story about Bill Moyers and the old man he knew, with whom he would sit for hours on end and discuss nothing but baseball. Finally another friend of Moyers's asked him "How can you bear to talk so long with that old man? All he wants to talk about is baseball." And Moyers said, "No, you don't understand. That fellow is a great teacher. We talk about everything. Baseball is just his mobile reality structure."

Jim Kennedy Wow. From Nordic literature to erotica to A-Team. If you'll forgive a quote, you've come a long way, baby. I'm afraid I'm more one of the people you did the sex zine for than I am a RABBITEARS sympathizer. I don't hate tv by any means, but I can't get excited about it. In my opinion, Monty Python is the only truly great contribution tv has ever made to world culture, and Alien Nation is the only current tv show I would make any effort to see.

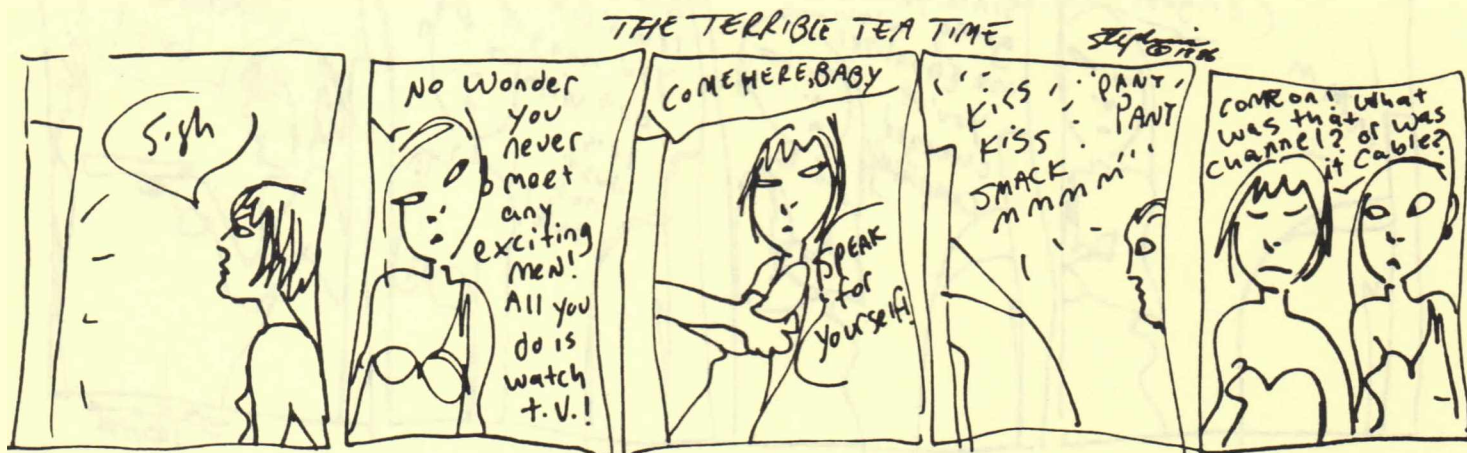
I was particularly amused by your several pages of editorial guidelines. I'm sure I never saw the like in all my years of fanzine reading. I'd be curious to hear what kind of reaction prospective writers have had to the exacting parameters you've laid out for them.

((So would I! As usual, I am still hopefully waiting to hear from several people -- you know who you are -- who 'lowed as how they might have an idea for an article... Close scrutiny, however, will reveal that the pages of guidelines came down to two: write real, and no mauling. The rest was just my own rationales for having even those two guidelines. So I hope no one was frightened off by (perceived) stringency.))

As an avid Man from U.N.C.L.E. fan, I was delighted to read about the hommage paid it in "The Say Uncle Affair" episode ((of The A-Team)).

Your "Perfervist" essay on 21 Jump Street, I'm sorry to admit, was more than I could finish reading. You did get me to watch a couple episodes. I'm afraid I can't see any real reason to make shows like Jump Street, but, assuming there is one, I suppose Jump Street is a good one. What surprised me is that, even looking for it, I couldn't see what it is about those boys that's got you drooling so. I guess that's just part of being a (mostly) straight male.

((Oh, I don't know, I think it's more a matter of taste. Though I feel no yen to jump her bones, I could watch Loni Anderson for hours. The other most beautiful woman I ever saw in my life, I grant you, was someone for whom I immediately and



totally and desperately fell. Anyway, I find it fascinating that you alone, of all the people who wrote or spoke to me about "Peach Fuzz", watched 21 Jump Street as a result of it; people who were enthralled by the piece almost all added that nevertheless it wouldn't get them to watch the show. Probably too soon to formulate a Universal Law based on these findings, but it's curious... I take this opportunity to assure those who asked that MAJORN #4 is in production as we speak, and that television -- even television as a mobile reality structure for talking about cute boys -- has merely joined, not supplanted, sex as a subject dear to my heart.))

Mark McHarry Your piece on Peach Fuzz was right on the money (literally) in how our culture devalues male "starlets". I regret only that I haven't seen enough of Jump Street to comment intelligently on your observations. But I must reiterate I can't get beyond the police plot to watch the show. The idea of undercover cops infiltrating a high school campus and busting students is so repulsive it's hard for me to watch a show espousing it, no matter what the redeeming qualities. This holds for most TV fiction, except some comedies/satires (e.g., McHale's Navy, and Married with Children). Even if I found the characters physically attractive (and as we've discussed before it's a rare actor who turns me on), given the context of most commercial TV fiction, damned if I'll watch it.

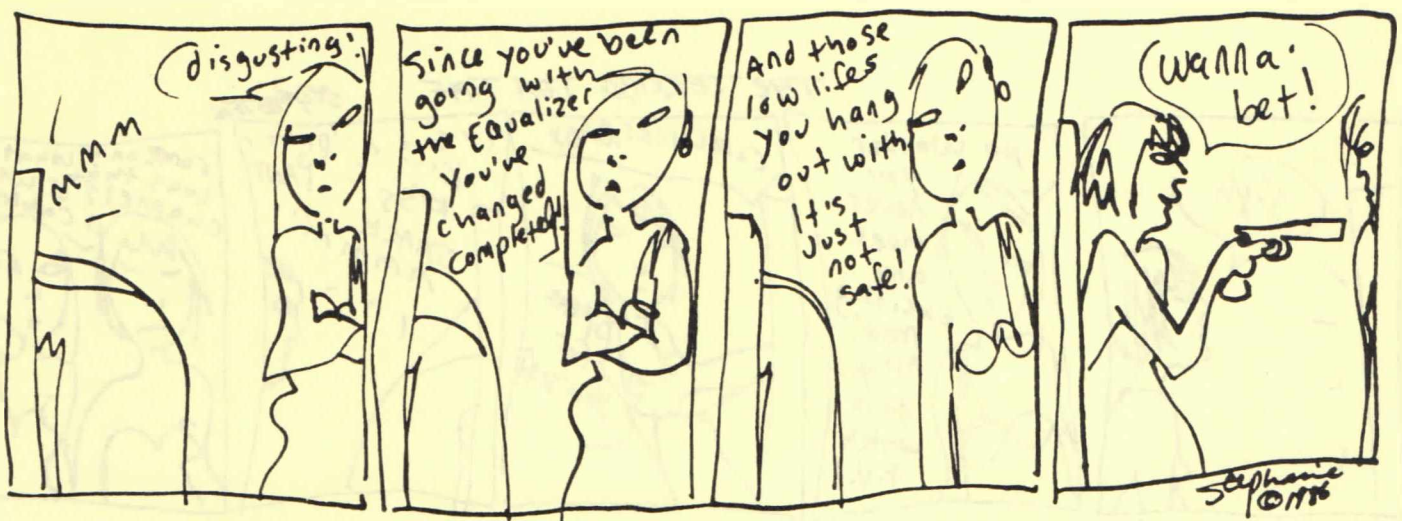
Jeanne Bowman While Patricia and I were driving around to garage sales & talking about Sesame Street we pulled up behind a truck with the personalized plate "TV WEANR" with bumper stickers for Jerry Mander's book. I took it as an omen. I didn't really expand on some of my ideas ((see article this ish -- ed.)) partly because I had computer problems. The o* went out on my Mac keyboard -- which I only noticed as "count" became "cunt". I kept entering my data until Nick came over and turned off the machine. Of course** I hadn't saved.

When I was just going to junior high school it seemed to me all we talked about was tv shows. I didn't think much of that unless it was The Man from U.N.C.L.E. Jeez, nowadays the kids talk about tv -- Most Wanted criminals but more likely they discuss favorite movies: "Bruce Willis is badness" "Yeah, Die Hard" "Dude, cool I've seen it 4 times this week" "Alright I've seen it about 47 times... He's so buff". My kids like kinder, gentler movies like Stand by Me, great tunes & classy gross-outs.

Don thinks you're a great writer & can't comprehend the trivial pursuit of A-Team but hey, he's seen Die Hard more than 6 times, is this male/female cultural dichotomy? Would you buy Barbie breakfast cereal?

* the letter o, as in "Oh shit!!"

** or as my machine wld say "curse"



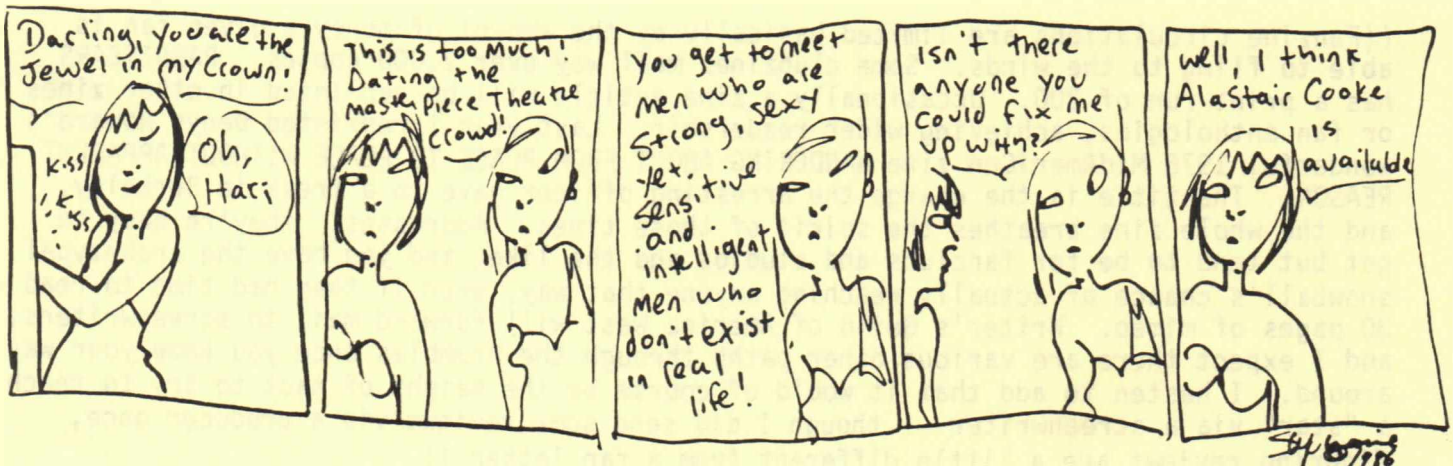
Cheryl Cline I profess myself charmed by your essay on The A-Team. I've always meant to watch it more often, but haven't mainly because it's too frustrating to watch TV. I can't hear it well enough. What I need to do is investigate earphones -- a seemingly simple task, but every time I've tried I've been stumped. I know there are devices out there, even some I can afford (hey, those closed-caption decoders are expensive) and someday I'll get something.

Anyway, The A-Team. I recall the humor being a little -- surreal. And my impression that the show didn't take itself seriously has been much strengthened by your description of the U.N.C.L.E. episode. I'd like to see that one.

Your analysis of the show's formulaic plot -- every episode the characters are shut up with the wherewithal to make weapons, etc. -- really reminded me of Perry Mason. People who dismiss such formula plots have no idea of the pleasure viewers get from them. Perry Mason aficionados gleefully wait for the moment in every episode when the guilty person finally breaks. "He was no good, my Johnny..." "Yes, I did it! He laughed at me! He deserved to die!" (Gary Larson did a spoof once -- "Yes, I killed him! Me! The Cow!") And if the murderer is a young Dick Clark (he plays a great psychotic) or Leonard Nimoy, it's even better! Of course, Perry Mason has acquired a patina of "cool" so it's easier to rave about that show and still sound intelligent. But I agree with you that The A-Team has its own charm. Mr. T for one thing.

I was thinking about All in the Family yesterday (I was composing a torching rebuttal to X, who's been going on about how she doesn't want to have any of HER hard-earned money going to welfare deadbeats who'll raise up kids who'll someday break into her house and etc. etc....well I went from that to mulling over stereotypes of poor and working class people...we now leave this parenthesis and return you to normal programming...) and had come to the disheartening conclusion that I'd always be defending my class of folks against the Archie Bunker stereotype when it suddenly dawned on me that the show Roseanne has gone a long way toward redeeming them. In the first episode I watched, both Roseanne and her husband had had to work overtime for days and days; their kids don't cooperate and get wild; he and Roseanne have to take turns cooking and doing housework late into the night -- and the guy just does it! Gad! In place of the old Woman vs. Man humor that sitcoms of the past were based on (Lucy & Ricky, Ralph & Alice, Archie & Edith, etc.) the couple here present a more united front: Us Against the World. The old shows would do this at times, but there was always the constant sniping as the running joke. Roseanne plays on this, but it's different -- they trade these barbed insults but all the while they're smiling slyly at each other. Actually, they remind me of Lynn & I... The first time the guy started singing (some humorously appropriate blues love song while he was on his knees scrubbing the floor) I was just delighted. Lynn does this all the time. Once Vaughn said he didn't like musicals because "People don't just up and start singing." Me: "They don't?"

George Moore Of course we want to see RABBITEARS #1. Do we not suffer with the



abuse of Roseanne's kids? Do we not thrill as Kevin digs Paul's Bar Mitzvah? Do we not sigh as McMurphy fails yet again to cope with that dishy M.D.? Do we not know that Vinnie Terranova is going to be finally exposed for good? Feed us!

Susan St. Aubin ((dated 9-29-89)) There's a new series on TV you might be interested in: Alien Nation, about some aliens that have landed on earth and are trying to integrate themselves into American Society, with all the usual difficulties; kind of like a serious version of "The Coneheads". Actually, it's kind of an encoded way of talking about racism, but easier for racists to tolerate and understand, since these are white people, even though they do have two hearts, warped ears, and patches of red lizard skin on their scalps. Keith watches TV constantly and these were good enough to catch my attention as I passed through the living room. It seems to have content, which I guess is ultimately more important to me than how well something is done. I dunno -- form without content doesn't appeal to me at all. Like writers who talk about the importance of "language" -- to me that doesn't seem much different than talking about pens, it's what you're saying that has validity, not how. (Of course, I don't mean to imply that language and pens aren't important -- I myself use only black ballpoint pens and tend to prefer writing in the past tense, no adjectives...) Most of what's on TV, good form or not, says nothing, and that bores me, I just can't watch it. Most of modern writing, I notice, also says nothing. Is this the influence of TV? Literature going down the tubes? (Except TVs don't use tubes any more, do they?) They all tend to write in the present tense, too -- is there a connection? Just pick up any recent issue of The New Yorker and you'll see what I mean.

((As painting freaked in the face of photography, and theater went abstract at the advent of movies, it could be that quality fiction will space-cadet confronted with the impossible standards of readily available illusion-making in video rentals and zillion-channel telly. You and I still have the jump on them, though, tv doesn't yet have an inkling that such a genre as feminist pornography exists.))

Kathleen Resch I enjoyed your discussion (on the beauty of young men) that explored the concept of ideas and feelings that have not been given English names. I've never seen 21 Jump Street, but I followed this article with more interest than in reading mainstream magazines about the shows I do watch. I'm also glad you discussed Jesse Helms's nazi arts censorship proposals and what's going on with the NEA. People don't seem to give a shit that their liberties are being eroded away. There's some sophisticated brainwashing going on in this country.

What sort of circulation does a zine like RABBITEARS have? I never got very much involved in the type of zines that circulate through SF fandom -- the small 'personalzines' done on mimeo, though I'm familiar with the whole idea, and think it's one terrific way to communicate. Were you able to get addresses to send them to the actual people involved with the shows?

((Fanzine circulations are limited basically by the amount of money a given fan is able to fling to the winds. Some clubzines mail way over 2,000 copies. RABBITEARS has a print-run of 200. Occasionally a zine article will be reprinted in other zines or fan anthologies, achieving wider readership. Last year I reprinted Denys Howard's wonderful 1976 MidAmeriCon zine WANDERING ABOUT FROM PLACE TO PLACE WITHOUT APPARENT REASON. The title is the charge the arresting officer gave to a freak in Berkeley, and the whole zine breathes the spirit of those times. Addresses: they're easy to get but tend to be for fanclubs and studios and the like, and you have the archetypal snowball's chance of actually reaching anyone that way, even if they had time to read 30 pages of mimeo. Writer's Guild of America West will forward mail to screenwriters, and I expect there are various other paths through the brambles once you know your way around. I hasten to add that it would of course be the height of tack to try to reach a "star" via a screenwriter -- though I did send some reviews via a producer once, figuring reviews are a little different from a fan letter.))



Lyn Paleo I enjoyed RABBITEARS. Only you could pull off such a zine. Unfortunately, I can't contribute much. My TV flew across the room during the San Francisco earthquake. The poor thing shattered. Even if this tragedy hadn't happened, I'm in Boston, and it is (was) across the continent. Often, I forget about the existence of television, until someone mentions China Beach or Star Trek or other favorites. But I'll continue to be a fan of RABBITEARS.

Elise Krueger Say, nice zine! (And I don't even hardly watch television, neither.) I read the A-Team piece to members of a group who used to watch the show faithfully each week, talking about the latest villains (no, this time it's evil communist Central Americans running drugs financed by Norte Americano big businesses who dabble in 'white slavery') just before watching Nova on PBS. It provided a nice finely-twisted cognitive dissonance with which to end the week.

Avedon Carol What a thrill it was to receive RABBITEARS! Hot damn, great writing, neat analysis, and all the things I love you for.

((blush shuffle shuffle))

I haven't seen most of the shows you talk about at any length, with the exception of The A-Team, but it doesn't spoil the effect at all -- your descriptions and discussions are such that you don't have to have seen the shows to get the value of the text, here.

With the usual grain of salt one should give to such studies, one of the many done on the effect of violence reported that realistic violence did seem to have a negative effect on children, but unrealistic, cartoon-ish violence didn't. The violence in The A-Team isn't very real and never kills people, so I wonder what kind of effect it really has. And I agree with you about Murdock -- he's fun to watch.

It's nice to see someone admit that they like TV. There is some very good stuff on (I understand that the British series, A Very Peculiar Practice, has been shown in the States -- catch it if you can). But even "junk TV" has its moments. I remember a few classic shows from various sitcoms that really made me hopeful for the genre -- not just MASH, but one or two episodes of WKRP ("Venus and the Atom" was very good), and even one of Bosom Buddies, a show I thoroughly expected to bottom out every time, but which did an impressive job using a deaf actress in tandem with one of the regular stars. Why, even Cosby has managed to bring tears to my eyes. And the Moonlighting version of The Taming of the Shrew was priceless.

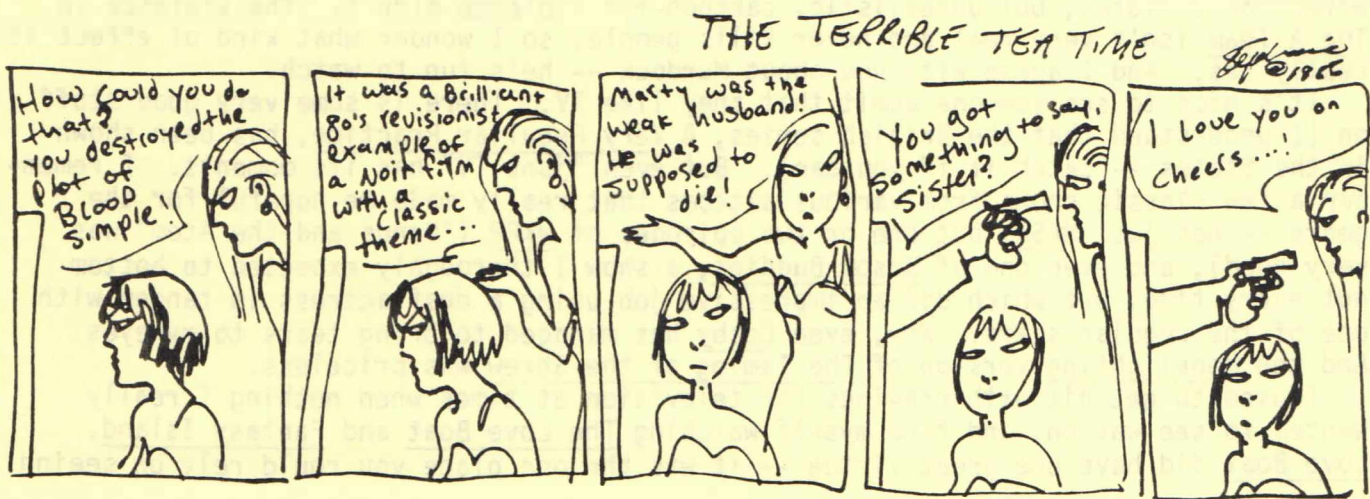
I used to get hit with cravings for television at times when nothing I really wanted to see was on, and find myself watching The Love Boat and Fantasy Island. Love Boat did have one great virtue -- it was the one place you could rely on seeing

some very pretty people who really shouldn't have been "has-beens". I was gratified to see Rick Nelson playing opposite Patty Duke, for example. I always did like both of them, and at the time, neither of them had been in evidence elsewhere.

Chris Priest has an anecdote that really exemplifies what is wrong with almost everything, these days. Chris was over in the States one time, and told some TV people that there was this British show they really ought to see, that it would go down very well in the States. They showed it to them, and the TV people thought it was just great, really funny and brilliant and all that -- but assured Chris that, while "we" are sophisticated enough to appreciate this show, most Americans aren't, and it just wouldn't go over. It was Monty Python's Flying Circus. It is so typical of these executives, who are not all that sophisticated and are often far lower-brow and less progressive than the average housewife, to have this condescending attitude toward the public and insist that no one will want to watch anything that's really good. You get the same thing in most marketing areas, including politics -- polls show time and again that Americans are far more liberal on many issues than the politicians are, but politicians keep thinking that everyone is so dumb and unsophisticated that it's just too risky to support liberal issues. I think that's why Dukakis really lost the presidency -- he walked out of that fiery liberal convention with a 17-point lead and blew it by getting more conservative every time someone asked him a question. I see by my newspaper that a recent poll shows most Americans believe there should be a women's movement, and generally support most broad-range feminist goals -- and yet, politicians treat feminist issues like the plague, feminism is over, no one wants it anymore. It's astonishing to see legislators waffling on abortion, too, when it is so clear that most Americans never want to see a return to the way things were before Roe vs. Wade. TV & film producers never give their audiences enough credit to even like the things they like, let alone what we really like.

Last night I was watching a show about Steve Winwood, and he was talking about how his career at one point was practically over, he had an opportunity to do one more album, and if it failed it was likely to be his last. And he decided he was going to do it the way he wanted, do it all himself. The executives were really worried about this, they kept getting in his hair and trying to tell him to change it and involve other people, but he wouldn't. They were sure it was all over for him. That was Arc of a Diver, his most successful record to date, which launched him on a whole new career.

Mark Evanier (Hollywood scriptwriter who also writes comics) wrote about how the censors would always tell them they had to remove this and that from a show because it would draw complaints, and they'd fight to keep it, they'd even write sacrifice items into a show just so they would have something to give the censors. And when the show aired, they never got complaints about the things the censors had worried about. All of these people who are so nervous and protective -- they're always wrong.



I'm not sure I'm impressed by people getting paid for doing something I've never done. I'm not saying I think scriptwriting or production are a piece of cake, but I've found myself in situations where I suddenly had to do this thing that I "can't do", and it was not difficult at all, and with very little effort I was doing it better than the experienced experts I'd been watching/working for/whatever. Hell, most of us could run for president if we didn't know someone would come out of the woodwork saying they'd slept with us or smoked dope with us or seen us wearing a cock-ring on our wrist, eh?

Still, I can appreciate a good show when I see one. Usually, though, I wonder what manner of cleverness kept anyone from coming in and ruining it.

I think that TV is much too important a medium to ignore, so I'm glad you're on the job, Mog.

PS -- yeah, I always thought Chachi was cute, too.

((To my dismay, stations buy sort of batches of reruns that may not include every episode. Ours didn't show "Venus and the Atom". Dagnabbit! It sounds great. Also, and this may not be obvious to our overseas viewers, versions that are released for rerunning are cut to leave room for more ads. Terry Garey says WKRP was often cut so as to remove the real kicker lines that actually made the point of the show. The heathen are everywhere.))

((I thought twice and thrice about whether I should print some of this next letter. Look at it from Johnny Depp's point of view. Last issue I mailed off 20-some copies to various Jump Street writers, actors, and producers talking about his "intriguing beauty" I mean an American man here, in front of his friends, but this issue has even more embarrassing observations and to top everything off, a favorable review of one's tush, good gosh. On the one hand, integrity demands you say what you're thinking and damn if I'll segregate my adjectives by gender; and I'm Byzantine enough to know the worth of Eric's straightforward note amidst my windings and twinings and also there's a value, a political point, to talking about this. I know there is.

On the other hand, I'm sitting watching my tv and this beautiful guy is hanging out in there so near I'm saying "Lhord.... You're just doing this to torture me, aren't you Lhord?" and there's no way I want to embarrass this guy writing compliments possibly even more humiliating than those of 16, Teen Beat, and Hot! Gorgeous Guys.

Another volley:

On the one hand, if you were a woman and someone was saying these things about you, you'd be expected not only not to mind, but to be grateful. And he did put himself up there He Was In The Wrong Part of Town And He Was Asking For It: skip that one.

On the other hand, I've decided a lot of the Red Jack techniques of "serious" critics stem from their fear of how terminally uncool it would be to gush. The critical equivalent of sticking your tongue out at someone you "like", at recess. 40 years of hiding stuff to be cool, what a crock. (Say, has it ever occurred to anyone that the ticking crocodile in Peter Pan is really the ideal symbol for age and death? In Never-Never Land, even the villain's afraid to grow old. And now back to the Women's Finals at Wimbledon.)

So there I am, rummaging through the ramifications not least of which is the improbability of any writer, actor or producer who's working on a weekly tv show (never mind two weekly tv shows) having leisure to read 30+ closely mimeoed pages from nowhere, and it really takes me some anxious hours to come to the decision: what the hell, print it. Anyone who's not afraid to kiss his pals on national television has more than a soupçon of moxie and is unlikely to languish and fade over the odd wolf-whistle or two in print.))

Eric Garber Thanks so much for RABBITEARS #1, though I don't have much to add. You see, most of my television viewing is strictly for sublimated sexual motivations. My roommates and I tend to focus on male beefcake; Dennis favoring All-Star Wrestling (ugg) and Michael and I tending towards VH-1 music videos. (I guess this isn't too surprising. Many of the lesbians I know drool over Cagney and

Lacey and fantasize about Jamie Lee Curtis.) I've become quite an expert on male nudity on film as well as film gossip, an important, and often overlooked, related field of knowledge.

There is an area where our interests overlap... Johnny Depp. I thought you and your readers would like to know where to get a better look at the little heartthrob. In the 1985 feature Private Resort, Depp strips to the buff to greet a girl, but is surprised by her husband instead. All of Depp's delightful backside is exposed to view. The movie itself is one of those insipid, sexist, teenage sex comedies, so if you rent it from the video store make sure to fast forward through most of it.

By the way, I was on a film crew for Rob Epstein's new HBO documentary about the Names Project Quilt called Common Threads (narration by Dustin Hoffman and music by Bobby McFerrin). So if you get a chance to see it, look for my name!

P.S. I'm looking for a copy of the famous Rob Lowe video. Any suggestions?
Best to all fellow T.V. watchers!

((I'm always a little taken aback when I realize just how into nudity other people are, because -- well, I have seen Private Resort twice, and I don't even remember the nude scene (maybe they cut it out for tv?). I mean I remember him taking his clothes off, but uh, well anyway my mind is a blank, and I don't think it is from being overwhelmed with the wonder of it all. To me, when people take off their clothes, they look so...plain. It isn't that I don't appreciate them as people, au contraire -- to me, clothes express something about the inner person that skin simply fails to get across. And the inner person turns me on -- at least, as expressed in worn jeans and funky leather, beads, feathers, bangles, long hair (can you tell I went to school in the sixties?) When someone takes their clothes off...well, I feel a great kinship with the classic leather fetishist who picks up a guy in a bar only to hear, when they finally get to the bedroom, "Thank god, I can finally take off all this hot sweaty leather!" I could never really get interested at orgies, for example, even S/M orgies, because damn if everybody didn't turn up the heat and start to shed. (Not to mention the serious risk of breaking your neck on that back room floor at the Catacombs, what with all the Crisco that had slicked over it through the years.) I don't have anything AGAINST nudity, it's just that for me it isn't a turn-on. Nevertheless out of purely scientific curiosity I can't help wishing I could REMEMBER that scene... [Time warp with us now to 6 months later: Private Resort was rerun on tv and indeed, they had cut the nude scene. Yet another example of vicious fascist repression of the holy spirit of Art, sigh.]

"Famous Rob Lowe video"? Hon, I wasn't kidding when I said I really know nothing about tv or movies -- or videos. Is this something like the David Bowie fuck video? Which I saw in Denmark on perfectly ordinary tv one night, and could hardly believe my eyes?

Incidentally, readers can also hunt for Eric's name in the credits of the lovely 70s documentary Word Is Out. P.S. COMMON THREADS GOT AN OSCAR! WAY TO GO!))

Kathryn Cramer A friend watching the third game of the World Series called to say that San Francisco had had a bad earthquake and the game had been cancelled. We switched on the television. And in those first baffled minutes, the most important question seemed to be whether or not they would go on with the game.

Because of the connection with the World Series, this earthquake becomes another of those cultural artifacts, like the explosion of the Challenger, in which the media are tightly focused upon an event that the reporters are psychologically unprepared to cover.

Many stations had footage of the collapse of I-880 in which it was apparent that it was a two-level highway and that one level had collapsed upon the other, but as far as I remember, no newscaster remarked upon the possibility of cars trapped between levels. Ordinarily sharp-eyed newscasters were unable to draw conclusions from visual evidence.

Most television programming, fiction or non-fiction, is emotionally inauthentic.



It is too planned, too premeditated. Newscasters trying to salvage rationality out of an earthquake's brutal randomness are one of the few demonstrations of authentic emotion our TVs will ever bring us.

Do we want our televisions to present us with authentic emotions? Did we really want to watch the faces of Christa McAuliff's parents as she died? Did we really want classrooms full of children to watch? Or would we have preferred to hear about the explosion in the presence of the benign American father, Dan Rather? Would we have preferred discreet, mystified glimpses to the Challenger coverage's uncontrolled gawking stare?

I am fascinated by earthquakes, space shuttle explosions, volcanic eruptions, unexpected uprisings in China -- in short, facts that overwhelm the factive power of the news media. I understand your sentiments regarding the non-fiction genres in television programming, but I think it is a mistake to exclude them from discussion in RABBITEARS.

((Whoa, there, I said people could write about any show they want in RABBITEARS & I meant it. I did say I refused to watch non-fiction, but even I stayed up till 3:30 a.m. glued to the one station with continuous coverage of the quake, trying to encompass what had really happened to my "home town" -- the place I had lived longer than any other in my life. Cheryl Cline, who lives in the Bay Area, shares some of your reactions:))

Cheryl Cline The TV coverage of the earthquake the night it happened was extremely interesting -- not just the unfolding story, but the way it unfolded. Right in front of you. I have never in my life seen television news look so connected to the real world. Everything was rough. All the footage, all the information, even the "show" part of it. No pre-written "spontaneous" dialog, for starters. There was a lot of "filler" dialog, of course, rehashes, quickly put-together "informational bytes" like what to do when you're in an earthquake, where the faultline was, what causes an earthquake, etc. But any time something really newsworthy came through, they'd just stop whatever prattle they were mouthing -- just stop dead mid-sentence -- and go into the real news. The male anchor's voice got hoarse. Once the camera came back to him too quickly and caught him eating a candy bar. Once he broke down completely -- when they flashed a video shot of a body on the Nimitz. He just went "Oh, god..." while the female anchor stepped in to cover for him. She didn't look great either, but she went into automatic. Both of them stayed on the

air for more than seven hours -- I don't know how long they were on the air, they were still there when I went to bed around midnight. And all the information was gathered right there on live TV. They'd connect to somebody at the State Capitol, for instance, where the emergency services were mobilized, and ask questions, and we got the answers the same time they did, nothing canned, all of it, as I said, rough. It was a Sacramento station, so of course it was on full power, but they'd sometimes shift to San Francisco stations, to anchor people huddled over microphones in the dark, in places that looked like garages and could well have been. They got footage from all the networks, and even some from amateurs (somebody caught a car going over the break in the Bay Bridge on videotape).

I kept wondering, why can't TV news have this human quality about it all the time? Why does it have to be so goddamn slick? Futile questions, I know. It was interesting, though, to see the facade crumble and get a glimpse of what real news could be like. Just a glimpse, mind you. You could see them struggling to get the facade back in place. That in itself was interesting to watch.

Oh, and the Emergency Broadcast System bombed. It just didn't work. Part of the problem is that none of the stations turned over their broadcasts to the Emergency station like they were supposed to. Some just flat out didn't, some didn't know if they should or not, and some didn't know the procedure. Thirty years of those annoying siren blasts for nothing.

((My other experience with newscasters losing it was during the Jonestown massacre coverage. Professionalism was lost -- much more briefly -- when local anchors saw the footage of reporters they knew being gunned down at the airport, and attempted to deliver bulletins about it. There is a Japanese term for the esthetic quality of roughness in art -- considered necessary to the highest achievement. We haven't reached that level of sophistication, and can only be shaken into it by disaster. Our national esthetic, not to mention politics, aims for the cover-up.))

Jeanne Mealy "Why I Like to Watch Other People Work" is a lot of fun to read, like just about everything I've read by Terry Garey. I understand how Terry enjoys observing people who enjoy what they're doing, whether it's carpentry, cooking, or the old skills featured on Hands. It's partly curiosity about how such things are done, partly a sharing of the joy of doing something. Terry does quite a few things herself by hand. Seeing how other people do things, imagining how the wood feels to a woodcarver, feeling the excitement of creating practical objects that are also beautiful, is a solid connection that's made all too seldom these days.



Amy Thomson Though I'm not a great TV watcher (it steals time away from reading such cosmically important things as Spiderman comics and Modesty Blaise books) I do have a few shows I absolutely adore. Among these are Red Dwarf, an extremely bizarre SF series done on an even more shoestring budget than Dr. Who; Black Adder, which is a hilarious send-up of all those period BBC mini-series; Star Trek-TNG; and my newest fave rave, Alien Nation. But better than any of these is Today's Japan, an English language Japanese news program, which frequently manages to be simultaneously one of the funniest things on TV, and one of the most informative.

Today's Japan comes on at some ungodly hour of the morning (on public TV), and we videotape it religiously. We get to hear all about Japanese politics, the yen exchange rate and the doings of the Japanese Stock Market. Best of all though are their feature programs. These range from the mildly interesting to the truly surreal and bizarre. They are always done absolutely straight-faced. One day the announcer (a woman named Kuruna Shinso) will say something like "and coming up -- Funerals for Pets", and sure enough, there will be a feature on pet funerals, complete with pictures of little Fluffy as she appeared in life. Only these are no ordinary funerals, these are Buddhist pet funerals performed in a panel truck that pulls up to your front door. Other times there will only be a bizarre caption like "Brain Dead Patient" in the middle of an otherwise serious program on organ transplants.

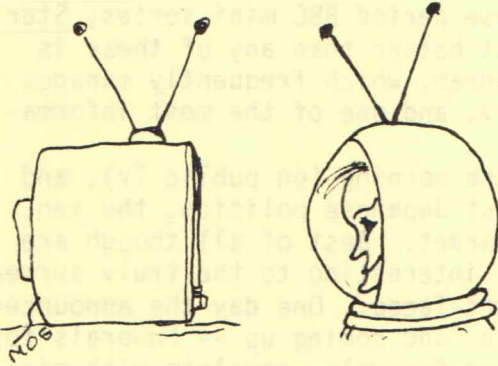
The baseball news is boring, except for the team names. You get the Carps and the Whales against the Giants and the Tigers. Sumo, though, is fabulous. Ray and I are glued to the screen for the tournaments. It's become one of our private passions. We love the solemn and serious Shinto ritual surrounding the matches, and the power and ponderous grace of these fat men in loin cloths. Sumo has a dignity that American wrestling, with its trick throws and theatre, lacks.

The serious news is pretty good, too. You get the Japanese point of view on trade relations, and international politics. You get to hear about their tremendous labor shortage (84% of all graduating high school seniors have a job lined up by October of their senior year). Their illegal immigrant problem (Mainland Chinese claiming to be Vietnamese boat people, and Bangladeshis on tourist visas). A murder or Yakuza violence makes front page headlines. Here, that sort of thing would be merely status quo police plotter stuff. Mostly what we love about the show is the different world view it presents. It's nice to know that somewhere there is a land where violence is rare, ritual persists, and the surreal is pedestrian.

Hal Davis Many thanks for RABBITEARS #1. I read it in one gulp, rare for me, who read a lot but at a glacial pace. Liked your perfersion on 21 Jump Street. I tended to watch it over my shoulder from my desk as Laura Haney (who married me) tuned in each week. I must've missed a few things, 'tho I liked the fizz Booker brought to the show. But to me it was just another teen-problem show that Laura digs. "What else is there [worth watching]?" she sensibly replied.



NEW



SERIES

For some reason it seemed worthwhile to review the f&sf available on area broadcast channels nowadays, and I found there's a whole lot of it. Some I haven't even seen, but I include them here for a complete current listing. Cable, which I don't have, would mostly just be reruns of I Dream of Jeannie and Bewitched anyway. I've divided series roughly (sometimes it's hard to tell) into "New" (currently in production) and "Old" (reruns or foreign imports new to us but no longer being made). 24 shows, friends -- not counting specials like Wonderworks' Narnia series, cartoons, or billyuns-and-billyuns of movies from Beastmaster to The Never-Ending Story (yes, that was a quality continuum).

Though not all old shows are available for comparison, it's clear there's a trend toward more and better sf/f on tv. A wider population is able to understand sf now, appreciate its game-playing and reality-harmonics, and demand greater authenticity. The last couple of years have debuted some serious contenders.

Blackadder

Premise: The title character, Edmond of Edinborough, with his secret identity "Blackadder" and his servant Baldrick, appeared for a series of episodes set in Medieval England, then produced descendants for several other Blackadder series in different time periods -- most recently, WW I.

You really had to be there. It's on cable, so I've only seen a few episodes at other people's houses; it isn't really a fantasy premise and I know I said broadcast only, but I had to include this anyway. Comedy of a most sable hue, see it if you can.

Dr. Who

Premise: Everybody already knows this, right?

They don't show the Tom Baker series, and I haven't really been interested in the show for its own sake. It can be fun, but the poor sound quality loses me.

Friday the 13th

Premise: A shopful of cursed antiques is taken over by three people determined to track down all the sold items and lock them in a vault to protect the world from their evil.

Me, the one who trembled in my boots all night after seeing The Fearless Vampire Killers, I actually watched this show. Then it got awfully gory and moved to 12:30 at night, and I haven't seen it this season. What I saw was inventive, fun in a horror sort of way, but starting to accept religious-oriented scripts I thought sucked (if a woman agrees to sleep with one guy, who she thinks is a good guy but is really a bad guy, then it's just the same as her agreeing to sleep with any bad guy, like, say, Satan himself. Somewhere I have heard this logic before...) The theme music is exceptionally beautiful.

Freddy's Nightmares

Appears to be an anthology show akin to Twilight Zone. I, for one, have never ventured past "Uh uh uh -- don't touch that dial --"

Tales from the Darkside

Another anthology format. The music is so scary I always leap to the set to turn it off before the credits even start.

Highway to Heaven

A Millionaire/Run for Your Life/Route 66 format; angels intervene in people's lives. Guess Michael Landon's role.

Out of This World

Premise: A father from outer space gave daughter Evie certain magic abilities. He's only a voice on a communicator as mother and daughter cope with Earth.

Light sitcom. One point of interest is Doug McClure (remember Overland Trail?) as a former cowboy actor turned small-town mayor. Scott Baio guested twice.

Beauty and the Beast

Premise: A man with cat features, of unknown origin, was raised by refugees from modern life holed up in caves below Manhattan's subways. He becomes involved and empathically bonded with a lawyer from Above. Their romance powers the series.

I know, it's cancelled again, but with this one you never can tell. Producers (and of course network) seemed to have trouble realizing the show's major points of appeal were (1) a profoundly understanding love between a male and a female who were NOT boffing, thus adroitly bypassing a lot of sexist gunk, or even kissing, a boon we owe to Vincent's cat lips -- they just couldn't figure out how to make that kiss look good on-screen, I'm sure; (2) a male who was Different (from both real ones and insipid-suited tv versions); (3) Vincent's original makeup (the first season or so) and (4) a wonderful underground world where people lived by higher values and dressed really keen in capes and tunics and things. The loss of the female lead might have been survivable, but the attempt to turn it into a Marvel Comic in the naive hope of attracting male viewers was a betrayal B&B's loyal audience justifiably resented. In the face of their outspoken hostility, the network panicked, and that was that. Fox showed ominous signs of senility by not picking it up even for reruns, and at this writing the series appears doomed. With all its unevenness, it was often lovely visually and it was original, unique television -- always a trait for which we must be whimperingly grateful.

Star Trek: The Next Generation

Premise: Nearly a century after the original ST era, a new crew and a new Enterprise go where no one (praise ghu for small victories) has gone before.

Off to, in old fen's view, a rocky start, the series has stabilized with some unhappy compromises and homogenizations: Wil Wheaton's character aroused such violent real-world hostility as to endanger his life, so Wesley's genius was bundled into mothballs; Data was too well-liked, so they cooled it; their female Security Chief went the way of ST security through the ages; Guinan keeps vanishing; Gates McFadden was fired and rehired, and the discomfort shows. There are better ideas but less risk-taking all around. The ship sets are exquisitely beautiful, which is a good thing since they can't afford many planet stories. Their Klingon makeups beat the ST movies all hollow; probably my vote for best episode would go to the one where Riker serves on a Klingon vessel, and we get to see some triff Klingon women -- the makeup is simply sensational. It all needs a much longer review -- someday.

ALF

Premise: Some kinda outer space puppet whose planet was destroyed comes to live in an Earth kitchen.

I haven't seen it -- it's opposite Jump Street so forget it -- but it's out there.

Superboy

Premise: The DC character, with modified powers, moves to the 80s and goes to college.

I thought it was just my notorious inability to recognize photographed faces, but evidently they really did switch stars in the hiatus. The show's about what you expect. Some good effects. They introduced a charismatic vampire, but blew the sequel.

Quantum Leap

Premise: A guy is involuntarily jumped around in time into other people's bodies to correct their mistakes, guided by an invisible pal linked to a super-computer (? I missed the first shows) named Ziggy who half-explains what's going on but always leaves out crucial factors.

The show's apparent liberalism lights up grisly innards, fluoroscoped by a frighteningly corrupt script on 60s student protest -- you remember: that attempt by rich kids to get their parents to notice them? Doesn't ring a bell? Maybe that's because you were there, which this script's writers obviously were not. And delectable Scott Bakula in drag cannot make up for week after week of anti-abortion scripts, self-immolating girlfriends, wives who just don't understand, and (groan) spunky ladies. Not to mention the script in which a certified femina sapiens is told to "act like a woman" oh do I long for the day when this masterly logic will be greeted with the hoots and hyuck-yucks it so roundly deserves.

However: Scott Bakula is adorable (besides his resemblance to Dirk Benedict), Dean Stockwell as an invisible pal is of course cute, and the consistent bonking up against chronologic incongruities breathes a truly science fictional spirit. Plus, even that dastard 60s ep redeemed itself by having a part for Raphael Sbarge -- hero from the days of the now-endangered (only one copy exists) brave film Abuse. (That's right. A no-budget film Rex Reed and Judith Crist raved about and only one copy exists. Alas, Babylon...)

In sum, Quantum Leap's squalid politics cannot but annoy, but it's worth the occasional gutterball of a script to see this concept played with. I love the little Hitch-hiker's Guide twang in the theme music. And on the "act like a woman" credits I was thrilled to see the name Ivan Dixon pop out as director. The fates of Bob Crane and (lately) Larry Hovis have been sad ones, in different ways, and it's pleasant to hope one Hogan's Heroes pal is doing okay.

War of the Worlds

Premise: Morthrens have landed, only hardly anyone seems to notice. Bands of underground fighters battle them in a world falling into ecological chaos.

This show has got to be secretly Canadian or something. I tuned in by chance to a scene of a post-holocaust type marketplace that was actual science fiction!!! Booths selling hunks of mineral, semiautomatic weapons being bargained for, wow, what is this! I'm told this second season's radically altered from a previous Who-like year; all I know is, it is now triff skiffy of the finest kind, at least as far as its settings go. In a big city fallen to ruin, moody photography shows fire-barrel gatherings of the homeless, slinking figures of menace, and general emblems of social decline pushed only that tasteful bit beyond what we already know on the streets of 1990, a bit reminiscent of Max Headroom only it's everywhere. Scavenged technology still works, electricity and water still flow, precariously, people still seek entertainment in rock bars and strip joints, but it's all kind of patchy and tribal. Meanwhile, laired in a big building, the Morthrens lurk in sets of fabulous organicity, all their technology being biologic. Gaunt actors do great work as these cloned humanoid forms housing Morthren souls passionately devoted to their visible god, The Eternal, and to stomping out the infestation of loathsome imperfect humans. They have green phosphorescent blood and emit pitiful little high-pitched screams when they're shot, which they often are. The show is ruthless to human and Morthren alike, and decidedly not for the squeamish -- human characters frequently get put to ghastly use in the Morthren cloning vats, and scripts do not back off from logical conclusions.

Alien Nation

Premise: 250,000 humanoid aliens from Tencton, dubbed Newcomers, crashlanded in a slave ship, and after only five years have perforce adapted to American culture -- some better than others.

This new Fox show has been a delight, thanks originally to its writers but shortly, when follow-through on such details as the freon crisis, juvenile Newcomer rebellion, and Newcomer admiration of ample women was abandoned, thanks became due almost entirely to a delightful cast. Eric Pierpoint and Gary Graham are individually charming and work fantastically together as the ever-correct Newcomer police detective George Francisco partnered with the laid-back, casually prejudiced human cop Sikes. The supporting cast is simply terrific, plus Sean Six, while they let him play the teenage rebel part that was originally intended, was fabulously sexy. If they would get those original writers back and give them their heads, Alien Nation would be a guaranteed classic, destined to rerun forever. The details of the show are, naturally, its strength. The wonder of a hunt through a Newcomer movie theater where an old Western has been dubbed into Tenctonese; the variations in makeup, so not all Newcomers look alike; the superb invention and performance of whole passages of dialogue in Tenctonese, with its tonalism and tongue-pops. Though we may not quite buy all George's innocent malapropisms ("Wild whores couldn't drag me away.") they are sometimes inspired, as when he declares perturb-

edly that the I.R.S. has attached his salary "and now they're going to lean on my car." (Following as the night the day from his panegyric on the wonders of living in a society "where you can look a government official in the face and Just Say No" -- he's exhilarated from practicing this inalienable right on a tax auditor.) (Sikes's advice: "Call them up. Grovel.")

Lamentable is the move in emphasis from Newcomer adjustment problems and human-caused hassles to the evil overseers. Who are the overseers, anyway? How did they get that way, who did they work for? (After all, "overseer" has never meant "owner".) They're Black Hats who stand in for thought and invention in too many recent scripts. Even so, it's tv skiffy at its best, a Must See, a new eagle-feather in Fox's headdress. Proviso: The show's popularity could be threatened if it continues to slide in the direction of a recent unfortunate civil rights script which with a few macho, unintelligent strokes tried to wreck the wonderful character that had been built up for George Francisco. A greater pity, because probably irreversible, is the way the character of Finiksa/Buck has devolved from a hip, rebellious, courageous teenager into a timid, obedient, dullwitted little prototyp whose emotional age appears to be about eight. One wonders what on earth they could be thinking of to destroy a character of such major attraction to the teenage market, never mind the esthetic collapse involved. The Born-Again Buck has the sex appeal of oat bran. Meanwhile, they just killed off the wonderful cross-dressing -- more accurately, crisscross-dressing -- Uncle Moodri, and the borderline retarded janitor hardly shows up. I fear 'tis but a grim precursor of metastasizing networkitis to come. Hint: if they put the theme song out as a single, I'd buy it.

Free Spirit

Premise: The new housekeeper for a single father is a witch. The kids know, the father doesn't.

I've only seen it a couple of times; it has appeal, especially the female lead.

Red Dwarf

Premise: All crew members of a huge space vessel are killed except a lowly menial, Dave Lister, who is in suspended animation for three million years. During that time the progeny of his pregnant cat, Frankenstein, evolve into a humanoid race; most of them blast off following the holy writ of Lister's laundry list to seek the Promised Land. When Lister wakes, he finds one incredibly silly cat-man (Danny John-Jules) wandering the corridors in eternal self-admiration. Holly the (male) computer and a hologram companion from the ship's records -- Arnold Rimmer, least popular and most incompetent crewmember -- are the only other regulars, unless you count a sentient toaster and some peculiar little mechanical devices that like to sneak off to the ship's movie theater.

Channel 2 (local PBS) brilliantly scheduled all its sf opposite network sf, so I missed the first couple episodes. Deciding ST:TNG could always be had on reruns, I sampled Red Dwarf and never went back. Thank ghod for small countries: it's a British comedy with none of the flash and glitter Hollywood substitutes for brains. Craig Charles as Lister, in a crewcut-cum-dredlocks that does wonders toward placing him psychologically for the audience, has goofy au-lait good looks that damn, unaided, the entire Glitzville value system. It's another of those faces that, in America, would've barred this delightful talent from the airwaves. His working-class delivery is impeccable and delicious in such exchanges as this on the unsolved mysteries of the ancients:

Rimmer (rhapsodically): -- like the pyramids -- how did they move such massive pieces of rock?

Lister: They had massive whips, Rimmer, massive, massive whips.

Rimmer studies for nonexistent promotion exams while Lister's book collection runs more to The Pop-Up Kama Sutra (Zero Gravity Edition). From the expletive "smeg" (whence "smeghead", "smeg off", "smegging (adj.)", etc.) to the fact that two of the three mobile characters are played by black actors in this not at all Black show (as America understands the term), Red Dwarf whirs with wit, political energy, invention and other rarities. I'm serious: beg your local PBS station to run Red Dwarf. If it keeps on like this, it's beyond all doubt the next cult classic.

My Secret Identity

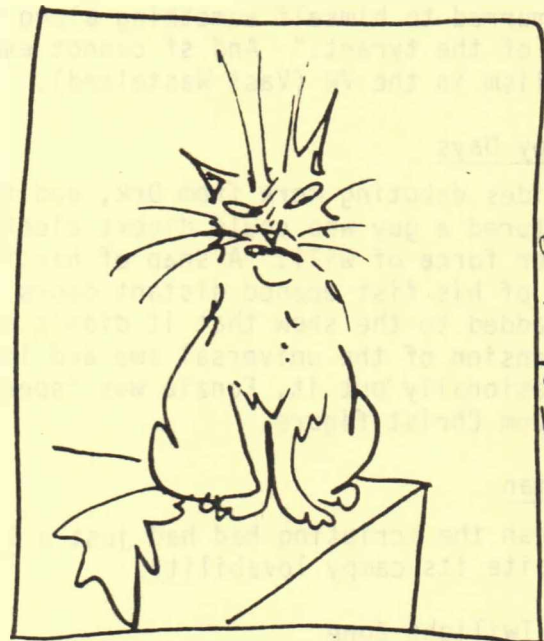
Premise: A boy stumbles into the path of his scientist neighbor's experimental ray and it gives him super-powers of floating, indestructibility and speed (later, through another exposure, strength is added). He must keep it all secret because... (I never saw the first episodes, but you can fill in the blank).

This show has improved a lot technically this season, but I liked it even in its early clunkiness -- I don't know quite why. There is something endearing about both Derek McGrath as the earnest, round-faced Dr. Benjamin Jeffcoate, and Jerry O'Connell as Andrew Clements a.k.a. Ultraman. O'Connell has a smile that should make his fortune, conveying a sincere and spontaneous lightheartedness not many actors have a knack for. He also looks smashing in his Ultraman costume, which, alas, appears only in rare dream sequences. Plots are local smalltown situations usually involving Andrew's school friends. Hereabouts the show was banished to Sunday mornings, but I hope it still has following enough to carry it into another season. It's pleasant to see the young Canadian actors getting parts, and I like the theme song: "You'll never guess my secret identity...who's on the inside hiding out. You never know what you'll see, when you unlock a mystery..."

The Munsters Today

Premise: The opening theme says it -- the Munsters went to sleep 20 years ago, and now are back "with a brand new show".

"Wintermoon Music" and "Surf Fetish" among the credits add their bit to the otherworldly atmosphere in which innocent monsters perform little moral minuets each week. Howard Morton as the sourpuss vampire Grandpa Vladimir Dracula creates a particularly appealing characterization, but they are all good. I would not have believed till I saw it, for instance, John Schuck's successful Henry Fonda impression



STRIP T '88 by Stephanie G88

When he told her his cat was possessed by ELVIS... She laughed! But later, when she noticed the Sneeep... She wasn't so Sure...

while in full Herman Munster makeup. The series is full of contemporary references, particularly to other shows, that often suit my views: an electrical malfunction zaps Eddie out of the mansion and into the tv set. Grandpa, watching Eddie's show: "It could have been worse. It could have been CBS."

Mork and Mindy

Everyone knows how great Robin Williams is, and though he makes kinda scornful references to the show in his comedy records, the sweet visitor from Ork was emotionally appealing, politically almost radical, and physically beautiful in a style not often permitted in adult media. As Cheryl Cline has pointed out, if it is immature of women to be attracted by the "non-threatening" male figure, the only possible conclusion is that female maturity consists in attraction to threatening males -- a corollary ever unspoken which, once noticed, has to give one pause. The lovable Mork was and is one of the saner replies to this psychotic proposition.

Star Trek

If you don't already know Star Trek in all its flawed glory, I'm amazed you managed to stumble across RABBITEARS (or, for that matter, Western civilization) at all. Welcome. This and the preceding three shows had been on one right after another on Sunday mornings, kind of an astonishing f/sf lineup when you think about it. Susan Sontag once predicted, I'm told, that science fiction would take over as our means of telling stories. Could she be right? She didn't like the idea and I have to confess that seeing the growing percentage of f/sf shows takes even me aback. But as we all know, the science fictional setting can free writers to make comments a mundane show might not get away with -- last week Captain Picard murmured to himself something along the lines of "Internal security -- the eternal cry of the tyrant." And sf cannot exactly be accused of displacing scads of realism in the VW (Vast Wasteland).

Happy Days

Besides debuting Mork from Ork, and the occasional fantasy episode, Happy Days featured a guy who could divert electricity and overcome the laws of inertia by sheer force of will. A snap of his fingers turned lights and music on and off, a tap of his fist opened distant doors. Fonzie's magic was so carefully and gradually added to the show that it didn't even register as such, but merely as another extension of the universal awe and love he commanded. As characters on the show occasionally put it, Fonzie was "special"; perhaps the nearest tv has come to a sitcom Christ figure.

Batman

I wish the scripting had had just a little more bite. I quickly tire of the show, despite its campy lovability.

The Twilight Zone

I remember some good old episodes, but scary stuff is not my thing, and I only watch if an actor I want to see is on, like Jonathan Ward or James Whitmore, Jr. Sorry.

Blake's 7

Three-camera science fiction is unheard of here, but the dauntless Brits create at least the sense of it in inexpensive productions like Dr. Who. The tradition car-

ries on here, that odd "taped before a live studio audience" feel wrung even from sound-stage and location sets. Sound quality, thank ghod, is superior to the rather cavalier attitude toward microphone position of Dr. Who and (say) Eastenders; fortunate, as the sarcastic lines are the chief delight of most Blake's 7 scripts.

(Both looking coolly and absolutely detached down at the body of a Federation guard with a knife sticking out of his back:)

Avon: That's a difficult way to commit suicide.

Dayna: Maybe he was cleaning it and it went off.

Visually, the show ranges from ordinary to fascinating -- one episode on an interstellar casino has knockout visuals from start to finish, really breathtaking television. If you've turned up your nose at Blake's 7, try and catch this episode someday.

American actresses, directors, casting directors and writers would do well to emulate some aspects of the female characters on this show; coming from me, a major compliment. The U.K. never caught the knack of Barbiedoll makeup and, perhaps because their stage and screen capitals aren't 3,000 miles asunder, there's a marvelous legitimate-theater quality to the looks and performances of their television actresses. In America, in fact, Jan Chappell would probably never have been allowed a lead on tv because she isn't pretty enough. No, she isn't pretty, she is staggeringly beautiful in a mode Hollywood's Revlon-queens no longer have the balls to understand. She plays the competent pilot/empath/everything-else Cally. Lovely Dayna is a tall black woman with penchants for high heels and hand-to-hand combat. Typical of her role is the totally throwaway second and a half in which, when a male comrade returns to the ship wounded, she is the one who automatically catches him up in her arms and carries him off-screen. The taste with which this is done is mind-boggling, you could easily miss it if you blinked, no fuss made of it. Then there's a wondrous villainess, Servalan, a gorgeous hawk of a woman with hair cut almost to the scalp who slinks hither and thither in sexy sheath dresses projecting menace, authority, true chill, competence, all those things American actresses can't seem to get. And she does it like Hatshepsut taking the stage in amateur court theatrics; like falling off a log. The kind of woman red-blooded masochists pray to meet in the dark alleys of their dreams. Did I mention she's the President of the Galaxy? As the Liberator sweeps about knocking the bejeezus out of the evil Federation, Servalan survives; so does the show, despite cast losses even unto the very title character. Long may its reruns wave.

(Caveat: Some later stories ("Power" springs immediately and grotesquely to mind) were written to be as sexist and offensive as possible; it's as if someone caught on to what the women characters were and felt a burning need to insult and humiliate them. We meet these guys every day on the street, in "great" literature, at work, and in the offices of doctors whom we pay handsomely and we really should be used to it by now, but it does seem a shame they wormed their way into this show.)

TOTAL U S WEST COMMUNICATIONS LOCAL USAGE	3.92
TOTAL CURRENT CHARGES	20.55

"SPOONFUL OF SUGAR" AWARD FOR MOST UNINTENTIONALLY HILARIOUS AD SLOGAN :

"U.S. West -- making the most of your time."

The End in View

Now that Reagan's War on Drugs has (!!!SURPRISE!!!) turned into a shooting war in Central and South America, complete with U.S. helicopters, U.S. attack jets, and the too-well-known-to-need-an-introduction U.S. Military Advisers, maybe in a couple-three years the Crack Down On Crack fans will slowly lift their heads, unslack their jaws, go "Duh..." and crease their brows in doubt. Uh, you mean...we been had... again?

I never could understand the appeal of The Three Stooges. More goal oriented than I look in my fraying plaid-flannel cuffs and holey t-shirts, I hated the frustration as they ran their heads into brick walls, each other, and a wealth of blunt instruments and tripped interminably over their own feet trying to get anything done.

In For Your Own Good Alice Miller explained why humanity lets itself be led by packs of lying vandals. That doesn't make it any easier to watch.

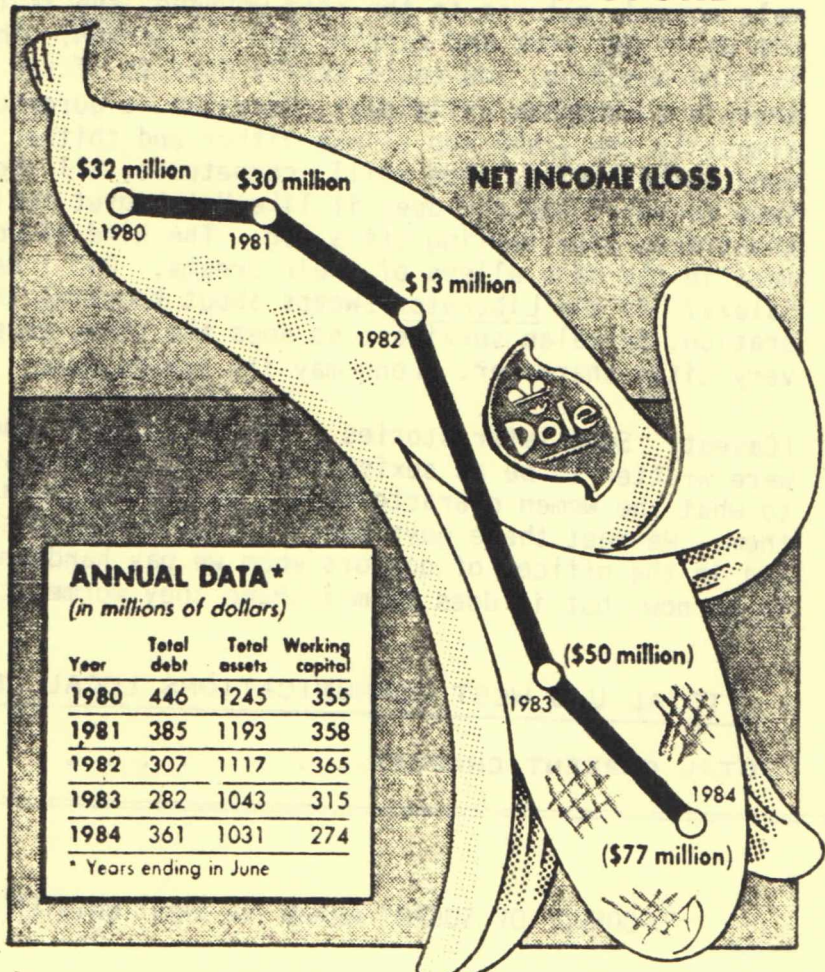
The United States paid and supported Manuel Noriega through 30 years of lawless violence before he began to be uncontrollable for their purposes. When it became clear he'd slipped their leash, the U.S. government determined to be rid of him by January 1,

when Panama was to appoint its own first commissioner of the Canal, previously a U.S. privilege. To loosen his foothold, the U.S. carefully destroyed Panama's economy, while negotiating with Noriega on the side to get him to take his hundreds of millions and scam, like Marcos. But finally the U.S. knew Noriega's relations with at least some drug dealers were recently so poor -- they'd put a price on his head -- that he probably wouldn't dare leave the protection of his army. So, in a one-month period alone, just before the invasion, the CIA spent \$3 million "encouraging" various Panamanians to oust Noriega.

This invasion was described as an act of neighborliness and hygiene. Would someone could perform such a neighborly cleansing on the thugs and hooligans in our government...

The Canal of course wasn't the only thing at stake. There are always direct U.S. business and military holdings. But it was also repeatedly emphasized that Panama had become a haven for "narcotics traffickers", "narcotics" being their inaccur-

BRUISING TIMES AT CASTLE & COOKE



ANNUAL DATA*
(in millions of dollars)

Year	Total debt	Total assets	Working capital
1980	446	1245	355
1981	385	1193	358
1982	307	1117	365
1983	282	1043	315
1984	361	1031	274

* Years ending in June

ate word for any illegalized drug, however non-narcotic its effects.

U.S. forces and military aid already saturate Peru, Bolivia, and Colombia on the same excuse of suppressing cocaine. Whenever possible it's implied that the communist menace and the drug menace are identical, as in stress laid on Noriega's close ties with Cuba and Nicaragua (closer, presumably, than his ties with his paymasters and arms suppliers in Washington), nations that could scarcely afford to cut trade ties with anyone, thanks to U.S. economic pressures upon them.

It's not exactly a major secret that covert agencies like the CIA make a lot of their money dealing heroin; heroin is big business anyway and big business is government's middle name. Now these upstart Spick coke companies are moving in on that clientele. The U.S. drug "war" in Latin America is actually the public face of a hostile corporate takeover.

Meanwhile in the U.S. people with epilepsy or glaucoma are arrested for their medicinal use of marijuana. Federal student aid is tied to taking the pledge not to use

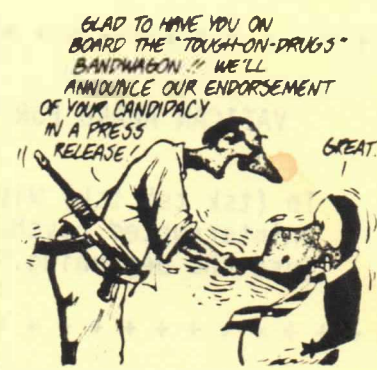
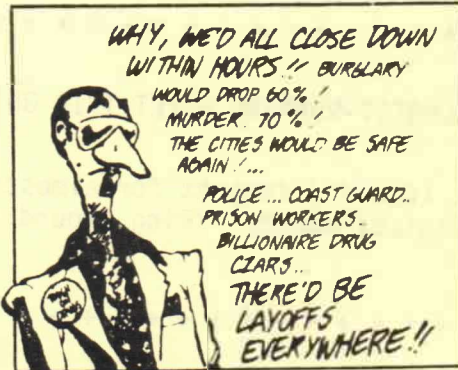
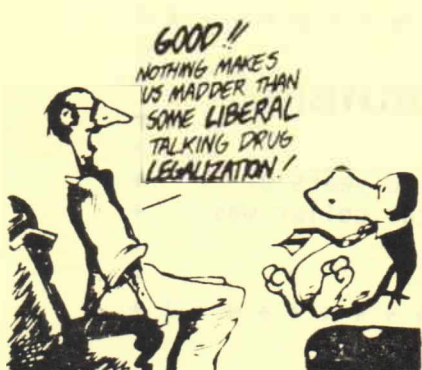
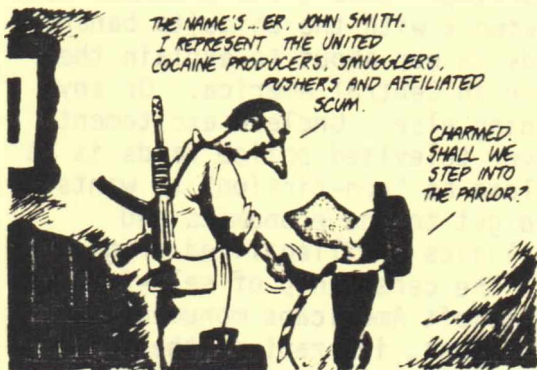
drugs, and Congress is trying to tie it to military service -- thus socking the poor with the job of defending our drug investments before they can go to college, then kicking them out of school if they use.

(The Armed Forces, as everyone knows, are also major consumers of drugs, especially in combat areas.) Under cover of all the hoopla the Supreme Court finally let states deny the Native American Church the use of its sacrament (peyote), while drug enforcement is taking more and more minority kids from their homes and putting them into the morally uplifting environment of juvie hall.

As lawyer F. Lee Bailey put it, "The law's gone bananas over drugs and a lot of rights are being eroded." With glasnost and all, drugs are being forced to do everything the Communist Menace used to do to rationalize "internal security" measures and external aggressions. A tall order.

The number of federal law enforcement wiretaps jumped 6 percent in 1989 over 1988, chiefly because of a 22 percent increase in their use in drug investigations, the government says. The Administrative Office of the United States Courts said state law enforcement wiretaps in 1989 increased 2 percent over the previous year. More than 48 percent of all state wiretaps were carried out in New York (118) and New Jersey (101), the report said.

Alcohol retained its dubious distinction as the No. 1 substance abuse problem at U.S. colleges and universities, despite widespread concern over cocaine and other drugs, according to a survey of 200 schools by the American Council on Alcoholism. Drugs ranked a distant fifth in the survey on critical health issues, trailing well behind drinking, AIDS, racism and the need for healthier lifestyles.



from Bloom County, by Berke Breathed © some ripoff syndicate or other

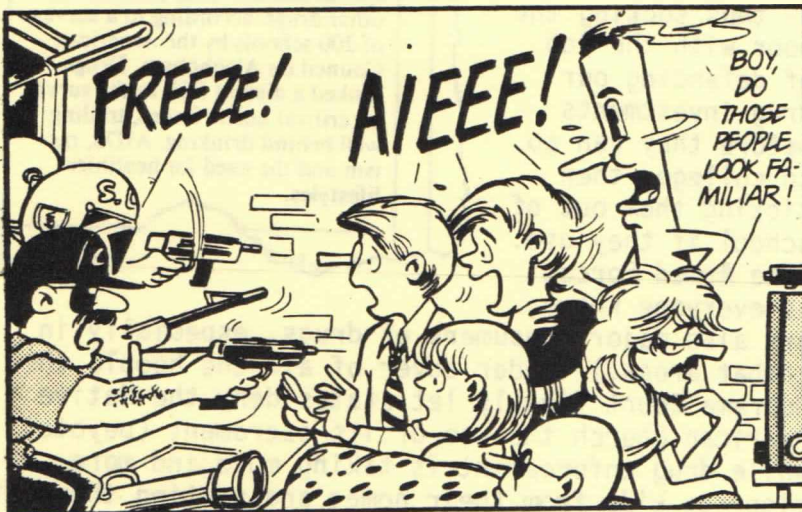
There's worse of course. When Pan Am 103 blew up over Scotland, it allegedly had on board 8 rogue CIA agents returning to blow the whistle on CIA drug smuggling connections (why don't these guys ever have sense enough to go straight to the world press? I thought it was only on tv that people who Knew Too Much were so dumb.) Pan Am, whose insurance investigators discovered the CIA knew the bomb was being loaded on board, and then, allegedly, identified 5 of the rebel agents, subpoenaed the CIA, the FBI, and the Drug Enforcement Administration, you can guess with what success. At the same time this went semi-public last fall, garden supply houses across the U.S. were crushed by Operation Green Merchant. On the grounds that some of the Gro-Lites they sell might be used by the purchasers to raise a little Mary Jane, their records and assets were seized indefinitely, even though the store owners were charged with no crimes. So -- if the CIA let 207 people die in midair overseas to protect its Mid-East drug & gun goons, at home the self-righteous drugwarmongers go to the pettiest lengths of cruel stupidity to stamp out competition, for basically the same reason.

The seeming contradiction of government supporting drug traffic yet pushing tougher laws against drugs is of course no contradiction at all in reality. Without illegalization, drug prices would plummet to mere pennies a pop, ruining the industry for major players and making it impossible for entire national peasant economies to survive on the trade, thus killing supply overnight.

What does this stuff have to do with television? Nothing. That's the problem. The network with the Chiquita banana ads is not about to explain the war in Central America. Or anything else. Unclean excitement over televised police raids is as close as "non-fiction" tv wants to get to the economics and politics of illegalized drugs.

The censorship of self-interest has left Americans monumentally ignorant, ignorant of the fact that they've been made ignorant: disinformed.

As long as business pays for what tv and other media say, that's exactly what people will get from media: the business.



from Doonesbury, © 1990 G.B. Trudeau

"The End in View" will be an ongoing column on censorship and related issues in television. Readers are invited to submit guest columns on aspects of censorship that interest them.

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 + VATICAN AWARD FOR LONGEST-RUNNING GUILT TRIP ON TELEVISION: +
 +
 + To (tsk tsk tsk) Wisk liquid detergent for almost 30 years of +
 + uninterrupted psychological abuse: "Ring around the collar was +
 + just the beginning." +
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My brother saunters down the aisle, his best man behind him followed by several identically tuxedoed friends. As they array themselves to the right of the floral altar a small voice is heard. "Ah ah ah." It is The Count. Jennifer Robin has not enumerated aloud each of the wedding participants but got right to the nitty gritty -- that singular chuckle indicating she has added them up. "Ah ah ah." This may make no sense if you have never spent time on Sesame Street.*

I run the bath, add a bit of watered down shampoo for the necessary bubbles and begin singing about the rubber ducky as Nick puts in the toys. Grover crooning to his bath toys is one of my sweetest memories of Sesame Street. "Rubber Ducky I'm awfully fond of you doo doody do". Now Nick sings from the tub "Rubber Ducky you're the one one two three, one two three cookies!!!"

I watched a lot of Sesame Street with Jaime ten, eleven years ago. Then I

blew up the T.V., moved to the country & built me a home. Now Jaime's city cousin Jennifer Robin is plugged in. Jaime wonders if his brother Nick is dull or what. Granted Jennifer is very bright, but try to explain that Nick has talents which don't come from daily nourishment at the boob tube. He will bring out & assemble all the ingredients to make cookies, from mixer to salt. But you see Jennifer knows and sings her alphabet. She recognizes most letters and can name them for you. She can accurately count to ten in English and Spanish. She watches "Street", as she calls it, every day. My niece is a month younger than my son, both became two just this month.

Hey, I didn't always watch the show with Jaime. It was entirely pleasant as background for great numbers of odd chores. "One two three four five six seven eight nine ten eleven twelve doot doo doo dootytedoot de dooty de dooot toot de doody doot" is a great mantra for folding diapers. Some people thought early Sesame Street was too speedy -- too many little bits too fast. They slowed down. I heard this story: anybody who wanted to work on the program was put in a room with a dozen children and a television. If at the end of an hour the younguns were not glued to the tube one had the job. I have always secretly wished this was true and that the same test be used for all day care providers and grade school teachers.

* It made no sense to me, so Jeanne had to explain: The Count is a character on Sesame Street, a "polyester pale purple hand-puppet Dracula" much concerned with matters mathematical. Since receiving this article I've watched some Street myself -- an amazing show!

Patricia, another mother, shared her favorite segment from the "Street"....The big cowboy is sitting at the bar. The other rangers and cowpokes are shaking and quaking in their boots as he growls out "I wanna know Y. I just wanna know Y. Y, the letter Y." She recalled a record she had a decade ago, before she moved to the country etc., of Sesame Street songs done by Stevie Wonder, Judy Collins, Paul Simon, Buffy St. Marie, Ritchie Havens and all sorts of unlikely musicians. I haven't checked to see if I still have mine or if I just have the "Disco Duck Does the Hokey Pokey" (to give you an idea of how little quality musical competition Sesame Street has, even as a show supposedly for children.)

Lest you get the impression I simply adore Sesame Street, I still think Big Bird is a total dweeb. I can't understand why Snuffleupagus was invented. I am more than occasionally annoyed by Bert and Ernie (but love the way they dress). The take-offs of game shows are brilliant. The visual collages of dirty youngsters are poignant, accurate and fun, especially while accompanied by a chorus of "Ooey goeey, ooey goeey sticky!!!" How can anyone hate the show that brought us Cookie Monster and Oscar the Grouch?

My mother reports whistling the theme song to Street while she waits in the bank. She surprised herself. I think of all the other theme songs on television that have recorded themselves in my unconscious to be replayed in unexpected circumstances.... The high school band doing a rock medley that segues into "Peter Gun"; the campfire sing-along that drives from "Ghost Riders in the Sky" to "Rawhide" to "Paladin"; the tune for Mission Impossible on an elevator in K-Mart. Perhaps television is not an art; it is definitely culture. How many of us can refrain from vocalizing once the song for Mr. Ed is brought to mind? "Sunny days, taking my cares away...where the air is sweet... Can you tell me how to get, how to get to Sesame Street?"

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...I Can't Believe I Missed These...

5:50 **INN NEWS**—Brook Holbrook
MOVIE—Thriller, 2 hrs., 10 min. ★
"Night of the Lepus" (1972) Monster rabbits terrorize an Arizona community in this shocker filmed on location. Stuart Whitman, Janet Leigh, Rory Calhoun, DeForest Kelley, Cody Paul Fix, Amanda, Melanie Fullerton.
10PM **5 11 NEWS**: 35 min.
MOVIE—GONZA LIVE IN L.A.: 60 min.
Guest: author Jerome Litt ("Your Skin: From Acne to Zits"). (Live)

MOVIE—Thriller, 2 hrs. ★★
"Ninja III: The Domination" (1984) Well-executed genre-bender in which a breakdancer with ESP (Lucinda Dickey) is possessed by the spirit of a nasty Ninja (David Chung).
5 **MOVIE**—Drama: 3 hrs., 45 min. ★★★

MOVIE—Thriller, 2 hrs. ★
"Flash Eating Mothers." (1988) Unfaithful suburban housewives are turned into cannibals. Robert Lee Oliver, Donatella Hiecht.

MOVIE—Thriller, 2 hrs. ★
"Neon Maniacs" (1986) Three teens with squirt guns go after some murderous monsters that dissolve in water. Leilani Sarelle.

MOVIE—Crime Drama: 80 min. ★★
"The Daring Dobermans."

ADVENTURES OF THE LITTLE KOALA
The Daring Dobermans (1973) G, the successful canine bank robbers of "The Doberman Gang" tackle a fresh caper involving \$2 million in political funds. Charles Knox Robinson, Tim Considine. (90 min. ★★)—Sun. 6 AM. Wed. 8:30 AM

MOVIE—Thriller, 1 hr., 40 min. ★★
"The Marsupials: The Howling III."

NBC NEWS SPECIAL (CC): 60 min.
Jane Pauley profiles people who have gone through significant "Changes" in their lives: a 23-year-old Idaho woman who has become an "admirable adult," Pauley says, after "running away and using drugs" as a teenager.

MOVIE—Adventure: 2 hrs. ★★
"Velvet." (Made for TV: 1984) Government agents pose as aerobics instructors in an exercise to find a kidnapped defense expert. Polly Bergen, Shari Belafonte-Harper. [Time approximate after baseball.]

MOVIE—Comedy: 2 hrs. ★★
"Assault on the Killer Bimbos" (1988) Elizabeth Kattan, Christina Whitaker.

MOVIE—Drama, 2 hrs. ★
"Blind Rage" (Philippine, 1978) Action-oriented adventure centering on a bank heist executed by five sightless men. D'Urville Martin.

STAR SHOT
Celebrity clay-target shooting

LIFE AND LOVES OF A SHE-DEVIL
—Drama, 2 hrs., 30 min.
Conclusion. Bobbo hires temps from Ruth's agency; and with her life in shambles, Mary turns to religion. Bobbo Dennis Waterman. [A&E is advising viewer discretion.]

ATTITUDES—Magazine, 60 min.
Guest: author Paula Begoun ("Blue Eye Shadow Should Be Illegal").
MOVIE—Musical, 90 min. ★★★

GERALDO—Discussion, 60 min.
Scheduled topic: youths killing each other to obtain clothing.

MOVIE—Comedy, 85 min. ★
"Nice Girls Don't Explode"

WHITE FLASH*WHITE FLASH*WHITE FLASH*WHITE FLASH*WHITE FLASH*WHITE FLASH*WHITE

Suffering through the unbearably chi-chi white-flash editing of After Hours to watch 90 seconds each of Richard Grieco -- who ended up saying smilingly, "I think everything the government does is sh-" (quick cut to Booker clip -- hey, you gotta love the guy) -- and Stephen J. Cannell being amiable, I realized another reason the white flash exists: to authenticate extremely bad, sad and pitiful tv and to pad out bitsy clips with interweavings of glitzkrieg video manipulation (static, strobe, white flash, 5-second q&a, flash, montage of publicity stills, static, 2-second close-up of star laughing, strobed bits of ad trailer, flash flash flash etc.)

People have been telling me how much they, too, hate the white flash. There was even a priceless local ad (Rosedale -- Fashions That Make Sense) parodying those arty men's pants ads; bits of women's conversation about how much they hated the new style of ads with all the "fast cuts and shaky cameras".

By the way, they recently learned that, indeed, migraine is connected to high sensitivity of the visual nerve. I coulda told them if they'da ast me. I wonder if advertisers know that seven times as many women as men inherit the condition? Women being the traditional interface between tv screen and shopping cart, it might behoove the jerks to back off from the magnesium-flare footage. It's kinda hilarious really, they put on this barrage of deliberately annoying dreck and then wonder plaintively why viewership is down...

Empty Sofa Prizes for current worst white flashes go to Rave shampoo, Disney Channel ads, all ads involving basketball, the Police Academy game, Hot Lixx toy guitar, Sears (!), Visine (!), Sesame Street Live, A1 Steak Sauce, Apple Cinnamon Cheerios, Twix, Mazda 626; and the Grand CLICK Award to the Diet Pepsi photo-session ad.

While we're on the subject of outstanding achievement, K-Mart Prize for Worst Jingle goes to Microwave Hamburger Helper, hands down. Ming the Magnificent Plaque for Vilest Use of Pre-Existing Song: "Look What They Done to My Oatmeal". Otis Certificate of Recognition for Most Slovenly Rip-Off of a Melody: the "Gimme Three Soaps" Spirit ad (swiped from a really good rocker that goes "Gimme three steps, gimme three steps, mister, gimme three steps toward the door...") Hands up if you'd give the Mommie Dearest Trophy for Ugliest Ad Concept to that short-lived McDonald's scenario of dear old Dad pulling the plug on the show his daughters had been waiting weeks to see.

Lest you think I'm unreasonably hostile to the beauties of advertising, Silver Lining Awards for Best Jingles and Background Music go to: T.J. Max ("Never the same place twice"), Nestle's "Sweet Dreams", "Simply Irresistible" (probably a real song, if so it doesn't count; you know, no matter how many times I watched its fabulous visuals (braving the flashes) I could never remember what cola it's for), "Everybody Knows That Milk's for Babies" (except dumb ending), Tyson's ("Feeding you like family"), the "If I can do this, I can do anything" one-legged ski ad, Wrigley's "A Piece of America", the Era instrumental, Oxydol ("Grab a box of the ox"), the Shady Acres Pepsi ad, O'Boisies ("are oboisterous"), Crab Delights, the Certs "two are better than one" ad whose spooky harmonies remind me of a song I heard my sister's band practice once, called "Nightowls", and "Sweet Talker -- Betty Crocker", only seven notes long, like an Lll song.

Anybody else got jingle faves? Liking the jingle in no way implies endorsement of a product, I need scarcely note; the only one of the above I use is milk, and after Nestle's years of cheerfully killing Third World infants by slow starvation in defiance of all public outcry, I plan to avoid Nestle-owned products for the rest of my life. That's one image the most brilliant ad campaign can never repair.

Lately I've been ticked off at the ways stations, distributors and producers cut the actual story time of programs. It's bad enough that CBS, rerunning a maddeningly random assortment of old Jump Streets, adds a full 10 minutes of extra ads, making the show 70 minutes long (try getting two of those on one auto-set tape at the 2-hour speed). As we know, shows distributed for rerun in syndication are already cut to allow yet more ads to be stuffed into their normal running time.

Channel 9 here has taken to cutting into closing scenes before their actual end in order to start up ads. In the middles of shows, egomaniacal local weather announcers will cut in to announce -- slowly, elaborately --and then reannounce a STORM warning. Not even a tornado, mind you, just a storm. This would seem more rational if they didn't already run interminable weather warnings along the bottom of our screens. They've expanded this device to banner notices about programs to follow the one you're watching -- always, of course, just at the dramatic climax of your show. Notice that never -- ever -- do any of these vital weather messages and things trail across your screen during an ad. Then there are those station identification emblems -- some of them three massive lines of type across the whole bottom half of a screen -- that pop up in the middle of your program, often covering a face or a detail you wanted to see. Network and stations also insert idiotic "news briefs" of 3-5 minutes duration into their most popular shows, ghu knows why.

Last ish on the evils of "non-fiction" tv I grudgingly allowed that "how-to" shows like those Terry Garey wrote of might be an exception, since how corrupt could cooking or carpentry get? Six months later Howard Polskin broke the scandal in TV Guide: This Old House was accepting money and goods from building supply firms and then featuring those firms' products in the show, and not revealing the huge costs of their "do-it-yourself" repairs if the price of this donated stuff were added in. It was a case of gradual corruption rather than any original intent to deceive, yet there's no other name for it but product placement; paying to put Coors or Kools in the scene as boy meets girl is one of those honorable old Hollywood scams that chips so lightly away at integrity it isn't sposed to even make any difference. While I would dearly love to see big red and white Coke signs and Hoffman-LaRoche emblems behind every frame of specials like Crack Street USA and Traffik (both of which I refused to watch), ask any writer or director if it matters to her whether or not her scenes incorporate irrelevant product names. Whole sports "events" now exist for the sole purpose of placing cigaret names on tv. Product placement, as far as I'm concerned, is an ad in the middle of my show, distracting, and theft of time.

(An aside for your delectation, statistics pervs:)

	<u>U.S. Annual Deaths</u>	<u>Times Greater Than Cocaine-Related Deaths</u>	<u>Federal Funds Used to Prevent Marketing of Product During 1980s</u>
Tobacco	360,000	180	0
Alcohol	100,000	50	0
Guns	10,000	5	0
Cocaine-related		--	} \$8 billion
(mostly shootings)	2,000	--	
Marijuana	0	--	

Marijuana arrests yearly: 1/2 million Tobacco arrests yearly: 0

Producers have also cut story time by changing teasers from introductory "set-up" aspects of plot to pointless batches of preview scenes. Hardball's pilot had a really impressive, elegant teaser in which viewers were dramatically introduced to long-haired Kaz (Richard Tyson, well worth the introduction). Shortly, as if the show didn't already suffer enough from its poor writing, they dropped into the "preview" format. Now basically, all these previews do is demonstrate how identical a show is going to be to every other show of its genre, and how unriveting a plot lies before you. Instead of drawing you into the story they tell you the story, so why watch the E.P.? (Hardball, though with a strained, trying-too-hard tone, upgraded its scripting considerably in revival, but the network never gave it a chance. It's gone again.)

Wonder what they'll come up with next to cut into our art time. Yeah art. Crotchety about people in his line of work taking it all too seriously, Johnny Depp pointed out, "Film burns." So does a Klee, so does a first edition of On the Road...and the Pietà is stone but all it took was one religious maniac with a hammer. Art isn't permanent; only immortal. The first time I saw the Pietà I cried. From photos it had always seemed a boring piece. My life has not made me sentimental about parent-child relations, and I'm a downright hostile atheist, to this day I can't say what it was; there was something, the art and the knowledge conveyed by what had been done with that fine white stone. I read about its destruction with pain. Everyone interviewed was saying, oh we have all the pieces, it will be restored; but there was one employee who said, "It will never be the same", and I knew he was right. That art does not last doesn't mean it isn't the most important thing we do.

dust keeps the trace of tears
no print other than this pattern of things fallen
a little rain -- holes -- shallow
as the empty gums of buildings laid in Troy
all the work of love
all the work of beauty has
gone down to more dawns
than rain can count
gone down and made room in the light.

A LOOK BACK AT

Charles in Charge

"Baio is slight and dark, with plaintive brown eyes, a slight macho swagger (not overdone at all, for a teen idol) and an Eastern-city accent. He plays Chachi...

"If you go back a long way with Happy Days, you remember Joanie as a rather plump kid with a nice smile. In the past few years Erin Moran's plumpness has shifted around to the right places, resulting in a toothsome young woman indeed, and the smile has become quite dazzling.

"If you are of the right age and gender to go for Baio (11 to 17, I would guess) or for Ms. Moran (17 to 77), you might find enough reward right there to make you a regular viewer."

Robert MacKenzie reviewing Joanie Loves Chachi in TV Guide

I don't really have to point out what's wrong with this picture, do I?

Though you may not recall that Erin Moran was never what any sane person would call plump, but this is the genre that saw Rhoda as fat. Subtext in the way female attraction to Scott Baio supposedly cuts off at the age MacKenzie appoints for sexual maturity, whereas male attraction to Moran begins at that age: mature women are not attracted to youth and beauty.

Ho ho.

Joanie Loves Chachi was cancelled, and after rejoining Happy Days till its end, Baio popped up as the star of a new sitcom, Charles in Charge. MacKenzie didn't like Charles in Charge when it began, and since then TV Guide has only referred to the show in passing as an example of "junk-food comedy". There are two reasons for this: one, the plots are in no sense "important". Unlike Silver Spoons, for example, C-in-C tackles no "controversial" issues in its story lines (but wait) such as abuse, teenage pregnancy, killing for sport, and so on, though it will very occasionally take on alcoholism and similar safe subjects. It is a sitcom in the old sense, its "situations" being set up purely as a rack on which to hang its one-liners. With this goes a conventionality and even conservatism of overt politics (the show is a Scholastic, Inc. production) which might understandably cause a viewer to recoil. Secondly, the show's two focal characters are Charles (who is never given a last name) and his friend Buddy Lembeck, with a group of children Charles takes care of to earn college money. This means the target audience is girls, and see last ish for how that derails male critical apparatus.

Then too, critics have gotten snooty about sitcoms that are "all one-liners". Me, I love one-liners, if we take that to include actually little two- and three-line exchanges. Those beautiful little quirks and whipsnaps of speech delight me. They can be in different styles, I don't care, though I do maybe cherish most the type of sly yet loving impudence with which the whole of Buckaroo Banzai, that miracle of a film, was endued. Its "Why is there a watermelon there?" "I'll tell you later." has to be, in context, one of the most brilliant exchanges in the history of movies; but then almost every line in BB was brilliant; who will ever forget John Lithgow's maniacal "Laugh while you can, monkey-boy!"; Peter Weller -- whose performance was so shatteringly ideal -- throwing off "Tell him 'yes' on one and 'no' on two."; or that perhaps most exquisitely euphonious threat since the Bard of Avon's final quack: "Stand by to incinerate Smolensk." If I could make one film that faultless, I'd know I would live forever. Course, it would be nice to do more than one, say tv as good as WKRP and a flick or six combining the best aspects of Steelyard Blues. The Tall Blond Man with

One Black Shoe, The Boys in the Band, a little thing called Pound that no one ever saw but me 20 years ago, Pastoral Hide and Seek and a dash of Lindsay Anderson -- we left the realm of the one-liner some while back for sure, but I guess that's the point, you don't have to be limited to the attention span of a spider-mite to love short jokes. They have a sweetness and smarts all their own, and it's hard to understand why anyone would segregate them out into some second-class citizenship of humor.

Some anti-sitcom feeling is just undiluted critical snobbery: "'Sitcom' is a dirty word, but let us all genuflect to The Theatah." Shit -- the three-camera comedy is the closest thing television has to theater. Only there and in the soaps do you get to see tv actors say more than a couple lines at a time to each other, actually see them play a scene, let alone an entire act, comparatively untampered with. The live-audience sitcom in particular is a whooping crane, the only live-audience network fiction, except brief skits on variety shows. Probably a lot of RABBITEARS readers are too young to know that once -- in the mists of yore -- tv had live drama. Not even taped-live, but real-time live. (Ever seen an actress throw up on camera? It's happened...) (Actually it's a wonder it doesn't happen more often, the parts that are written for women.) Live-ness isn't a cult thing with me, I love highly crafted films that owe everything to the inventor of splicing tape, and, truth be known, I love a good drama, but the art of the on-stage sitcom is also a precious and special one that deserves respect it doesn't get.

Fandom knows the frustration of seeing good work unnoticed because of the genre it belongs to. I'm starting to know the frustration of seeing performance unnoticed because "a pot of message", as someone once put it, is accepted as the whole of the art. I'm no foe of message, ghu knows, but there's more message in one of C-in-C's clanging double-entendres than in the length and breadth of most network solemnities. The new Fox show Parker Lewis Can't Lose, in its return to a much older view of comedy, has started off almost totally "message-free" and lhold is it a relief.

It's hard, sometimes, to resist the received notion that drama -- any drama, no matter what glop it is -- is more "important" than comedy, any comedy, even if it's The Ruling Class. But I've said it once, I'll say it again: Solemnity is fucking over-rated as a criterion for greatness.

So much for the philosophical groundwork of our discussion.

Charles in Charge has an extremely rare history. It was cancelled by CBS, that moron of a network, after only a year, in 1985. More than two full years later, astoundingly, the show rose again, in first-run syndication. By that time, of course, the original kids must have been a little old to make a live-in babysitter long viable, so I suppose that's why the whole cast, except for Charles and Buddy, was caused to move away, and rent their house to a new family. It was the same premise and more or less the same set, and managed through the strong presences of Scott Baio and Willie Aames to give a sense of being the same show.

Nevertheless there were palpable differences.

The original family was the Pembrokes, Mrs., Mr., 14-year-old Lila, Douglas (12) and Jason (10).

The parents won't let Lila wear eye make-up, and look back fondly on their days of Springsteen concerts, and that about establishes their range; the show places them firmly in control and totally supports their authority. (Compare to, say, Leave It to Beaver, that weirdly revolutionary show in which the kids were right at least as often as the grown-ups.) Julie Cobb and James Widdoes make sparkly work of these roles. April Lerman is good as the bold-yet-crushable Lila, a character written with no strong distinguishing features (as is tv's habit with females), thus representing, with her parents, "normality" -- though a more sensitive version of it than we're often given. What makes this family really, really different from average film/video households is Lila's two younger brothers:

Jason, at 10, already has a major interest in older women, especially Charles's girlfriend Gwendolyn Pierce, played by the extremely pretty Jennifer Runyon. As Buddy explains, "When God made Gwendolyn Pierce -- that's when he knew he was God"; but Jason also throws his heart at other women's feet. A bit worried that he's so devoted to them while his older brother is indifferent, he queries Charles who explains that people develop at different paces. Charles's admission that he himself was languishing by the age of eight gets a high five and "My man!" from Jason.

The politics behind this, in 1984 (and verily today), were very interesting. It was a period when legitimate pressure to protect children from rape and molestation was often dexterously twisted into a denial both of

children's sexuality and of children's right to sexual expression. Legally, a child (in some states up to age 21) is defined as incapable of consent, which means prohibited from consenting; I have even seen a legal precedent that defined any minor consenting to sex as an accomplice in her own assault. When law gets that wacky, you know a hefty cultural phobia's involved. Children, though "incapable" of consent, are yet incarcerated by the thousands in jails and mental institutions for having consented, especially if they are female or gay.

Charles in Charge, needless to say, breathes not a word of all this. But when Jason's soccer-injured knee requires somewhat painful exercises that his mother is too much of a "softie" to oversee, Gwendolyn Pierce determines to help. Says Charles: "She's tough." Jason (ecstatic): "I know, and it makes me crazy." Gwendolyn: "We'll start out real slow and then we'll build up to something heavier." Jason: "Sounds good to me." Charles (skeptically): "I think he's already into something heavier."

This is not platonic -- though it may well be courtly -- love. Not only is Jason blissed out on his unattainable lady, there is a decided whiff of leather in his lines. Exploitative? I don't think so. After a San Francisco tv special on consensual sadomasochism, a 12-year-old phoned in to ask how he could get involved. The only legal answer is "Learn macramé and wait six years."

Jason's good cheer, sweetness, and sentiment were intelligently and charmingly played by a very young Michael Pearlman.

Douglas Pembroke, at 12, is also stunned by Gwendolyn, but for a completely different reason. Her adorable face and figure and sweet personality are invisible to him, but he happens to overhear her putting a philosophical point of view clearly and coherently to Charles. Gasping and wheezing, he staggers down the staircase to her, throws himself on her neck like a dying man in a desert, and croaks out, "Intelligence!"

Douglas, dearly beloved hearers, is a fan.

A double-dyed, costuming, FIAWOL fan who comes to lunch in a rubber alien mask and plays computer games aimed at conquering the planet Venus (Charles: "How long will that take?" Douglas: "I've dedicated the rest of my life to it.")

Douglas is the same kid I mentioned last issue who responded to Buddy's idiocy by scanning him with a tricorder and saying coldly, "He's dead, Jim."

Jonathan Ward is a wonderful actor. Writer-producer Michael Jacobs came up with difficult, sophisticated lines for Douglas, and Ward delivered them not merely correctly but with style. This intelligent portrayal of the fannish child, though of course in caricature, touched me, much the way Cruising's portrayal -- also, though unintentionally, in caricature -- of the gay leather community touched me: Hey -- that's my people up there, on the screen, for the first time.

Putting intelligent words into a child's mouth, rather than semi-babytalk, was a daring departure Charles in Charge will be credited with someday. All three Pembroke kids were given more real intelligence than any other tv minor I can recall, including Doogie Howser, M.D. Conventional for tv kid roles is a sentimentalized "wisdom" presented as the result of a Learning Experience (The Wonder Years, Growing Pains, The Outsiders), something safe and in line with contemporary middle-of-the-road adult views. We all know the rules this wisdom will follow; for example, Pony Boy finds an older girl undressing for him but "decides" to talk all night. All kid leads "decide" the same thing. Only when The Facts of Life girls reached their twenties could any of them break this rule. Aside from the risk of moral outrage, there is a strong superstition in America that adulthood begins with sex; that a minor who has sex is no longer a child; that "handling" sex requires great maturity and perceptiveness (you know, those qualities so many adults display). A child lead who had had sex without trauma simply wouldn't be viewed as a "genuine" child any more by an audience. So the child "decides" she doesn't want sex. Come right down to it, most tv kids "learn" they don't really want any of the things they thought they wanted.

The overt message of Charles in Charge was this same didactic "wisdom" stuff, but underneath it the kids were endowed with a wit and awareness whose like we won't soon view again, and revolutionary is not too strong a word for it.

I liked all the actors, yet except for James Widdoes on some ads, they've vanished from tv. One season on a sitcom doth not enduring fame make, but Charles in Charge has been rerunning non-stop through half the 80s. Someone should have noticed.

The Powells, Charles's second employers, are also good, but the characters, except for the grandfather, are very conventional (= unrealistic). Someone, no doubt, decided that the original show failed of sheer overintelligence, and vowed it wouldn't happen again. However, the presence of sexual jokes and even gay and kinky jokes continued to make this one of the more unusual "youth" shows on.

Scenic route that eventually leads back to the subject: Effeminacy has been a convention of American tv comedy from the beginning -- an effeminacy, I mean, that is not intended at all to suggest homosexuality to the conscious minds of viewers. Red Skelton, Jack Benny, Flip Wilson and many others exhibited mannerisms that, off-stage, would instantly have tagged them as sissies, but onstage were seen only as emblems of the comedian. It is quite certain that their middle-American popularity would never have survived any conscious awareness that Benny's limp-wristed stances and Skelton's cutesie-poo mugging were identical to the societal definitions of "faggot". Later, Werner Klemperer and Bob Crane on Hogan's Heroes used a fascinating array of Old Queen/Young Queen facial expressions, gestures, and interactions. Klemperer's were very much in the comic-effeminacy tradition; whether they reflected anything about his sexuality I wouldn't even try to guess. But with Crane, the genuine gay cultural markings were too explicit to miss -- at least, to anyone who had spent years among gay men, it would be obvious that Crane had too. As a teenager watching the show it never occurred to me. After almost two decades in the movement, catching the deathless reruns, it was unmistakable. Yet I suspect his gay moues and poses are as opaque to many viewers as they once were to me, because the overlap of queer and comic is so ingrained, and because these true gay male mannerisms can be quite different from the socially recognized symbols of faggotry as seen on, say, In Living Color. Then too, in real life, many straight men exhibit highly effeminate mannerisms which are unnoticed in the general assumption of their heterosexuality if they are known to be relating sexually to women, and similar assumptions protect an explicitly heterosexual tv role.

Many people don't realize that such comic-effeminate tv gestures and expressions as actually reflect gay reality are also comic indicators in the gay male community, as well as culture language. In fact, virtually every identifiable expression of gayness in gesture or intonation is perceived by gay men as humor, humor having been for decades one of the two pivotal characteristics of gay male identity. The other is sexual overtness. Combined, the two traits result in a cultural constant of rapid-fire sexual gags and innuendo and understanding which I experience as a terrible void in the straight surround; the gay male culture and to some extent the lesbian culture have this tremendous gift of sexual awareness, proportion, and verve to offer to the straight world -- the straight world still incapable, alas, of receiving and incorporating it.

Since 1973 when the very young David Cassidy, almost alone among Hollywood men, stated mildly but uncompromisingly that he'd enjoyed sex he'd had with male friends, it has been all too clear that, gay lib or no, you don't do this if you want to work. The modern young television comedians know the audience of the 90s, more alert to body language than the 40s or 60s audiences, might well interpret the convention on the gay continuum rather than as a comic device. Nevertheless, it's still readily available on tv in the brilliant John Larroquette's Dan Fielding, in Richard Sanders's stiff-necked Les Nessman, Gordon Jump's nervous Arthur Carlson, Ken Berry's fawning Vinton Harper, the immortal conceit of Ted Knight's Ted Baxter, Tony Danza's bridling Tony Micelli, and indeed virtually all the most unforgettable male comic roles.

Willie Aames first starred opposite Scott Baio in Zapped!. It's a somewhat heartless flick not likely ever to be a crash priority in the restoration campaigns of the Film Foundation, but his role was sort of an ur-Buddy, the womanizer/schemer roots from which Buddy Lembeck could have evolved. It's difficult to describe the looneytune results of that evolution -- easier to quote the quintessential reaction to him: Charles's long, bitter stare and withering "It's like talking to lint." Or the line where Jamie refers to him equally caustically as "The Prince of Dorkness". Buddy's that mythic Uncrushable off whom everyone's barbs bounce, harmless, as he tailspins through obsession after misunderstanding after disaster, into all of which he manages to drag Charles. Buddy lives in a Party Central dorm room, keeps individually named pet ants, aspires to date stewardesses... His manias and alarms can engulf anything, and then for some episodes he bumps to earth in

a sensible, honest, sensitive persona that ought to, but somehow does not irreconcilably clash with the Buddy of UFO experiments and miracle plant growth formulas, Roman orgy beach parties and Baldrick-like Cunning Plans. I never saw Aames in his five years on Eight Is Enough. As the Buddy who's advised to go to Disney World and search for his roots, Aames is made up and dressed undemonstratively, but, though I'm honestly pretty oblivious to lats & pecs, into the clothed form as I am, I long suspected that under those Lembeck duds lurked one of the hottest bods in history. His Paradise, a movie set in a Mid-Eastern desert liberally supplied with tropic pools and waterfalls, double-exposed its nudity to keep things chastely unintelligible (at least on tv), but there were enough loincloth scenes to prove I was right. I particularly recall one shot up along the length of his arm, that -- ahem. The rest of the film had a villainous sheik with beautiful amber-brown eyes but no seat on a horse, and one interesting scene about masturbation, which featured a chimpanzee (this desert had chimps, too, what the hey, why not).

What Aames does with all this gorge (root form of gorgeous) is obliterate it under his own manic, highly modified style of the effeminate convention. It would take more verbal skill than I've got to define for non-viewers just how the convention intersects with his sudden takes and high-horsed logical gaffes, but many of these exaggerated gestures do qualify. It's clear, though, how much more subdued the convention typically is in this young generation. If it's on its way out, it will be interesting to see what evolves to replace it.

Meanwhile, you can also still see examples in the acting of James Callahan. The explosivity of Walter Powell's temperament partly masks it, but the convention underlies every move and voice tone. The Powell cast consists of this grandfather, his daughter-in-law, whose Navy husband is far away, and her children. (Ellen Travolta, who was Chachi's mom on Happy Days, enters later, to the fans' delight, to mother Charles.) Callahan plays the grandfather as an irascible ex-Navy man volubly dissatisfied with everything and everyone outside his own family (particularly Buddy). He's a marvelous character, played with that rock-steady assurance only the older hands seem capable of. I don't know what Callahan has done before or where he'll go after C-in-C, but 30 years from now, when time has made the show safe to like, I think he will be particularly singled out for this role. It's faultless.

Like most tv moms, Mrs. Powell is only there because there has to be a mom, and she's written as a place-holder. She grinds a few gears in one episode, though, where Dreamtime converts her to a Mae West style hooker. Sandra Kerns is delightful at this impression; too bad there weren't more such opportunities.

Jamie is the fashionable, self-centered older daughter who lives to shop and be in the in crowd, ably done by Nicole Eggert. Her foil is younger sister Sarah, sensitive, poetic, politically aware and a lot taller than Jamie; Josie Davis won an award for the portrayal. Kid brother Adam (Alexander Polinsky) has been called a clone of Jason Pembroke, but where they see the resemblance I can't imagine. Jason was innocently hip, open, passionate, hypersensitive to failures, loving, and, as mentioned, devoted to Womankind. Adam at the same age was written as non-hip, fond of gross-outs, interested in boy stuff like tree-houses and gunpowder rockets, with no marked personal quirks -- "Everykid", more or less. The Powell sibs snipe at each other believably, though not with quite the intensity of the Pembroke wars -- in one of which Douglas prepared to torture the whereabouts of his clothes out of Jason by lowering Jason's GI Joe doll, dressed in an evening gown, into a whirring blender.

Being able to give these two assortments of characters continuity as a single program is what being a star is all about. Scott Baio is possibly the most critically under-appreciated actor in the Hollywood orbit, for the amount of work he's done and the exposure he's had. I just saw an ad -- well, an Entertainment Tonight slot, same diff -- for a new Fox attempt, where one of the half-dozen young male co-stars (is there something familiar about this format or what?) said proudly the show wasn't meant to just appeal to girls. Feeble as this is, you can see why they tried it; a show labeled For Girls by critics vanishes. Tabu surrounds all mention of it, except in ritual disclaimer. "Lance Bunsworthy, former heart-throb of (sign of the cross) pubescent girls, is now doing real acting, in the summer blockbuster Voyage to the Bottom of the Bloodbath II --" You might as well still be hustling junkfood and Environmental Destruct-o-Toys; you are invisible. That is, they know you're there, but can't seem to see what you're doing. What Scott Baio has been doing is four and a half years of stylish, classic comedy, with dedication to craft and to art; directing about every third episode

himself the past couple seasons; developing a lovely, playful transparency as an actor that is paradoxically part of a quite hard, uncluttered style; and, on the somber side, probably getting a little rusty in his ability to play through any other character but Charles. The series is ended, rumor says another Baio show's in planning, if so it shouldn't take long to see whether any creakiness can be limbered back to Baio's teenage elasticity.

Scott Baio as a teenager was unfairly blessed, with bewitching physical beauty, serious talent and good mentors in the cast of Happy Days, which he joined in its third year. At 18 he could walk onto a stage full of experienced actors and make it his own, and he radiated such natural joy and gaiety that lines came to seem almost superfluous -- he personified the title Happy Days without ever opening his mouth. He had also learned to convey a good deal of power with an instinct for understatement in more dramatic scenes. When still very young he contributed strongly to the excellent tv movie The Boy Who Drank Too Much, in which he played a 15-year-old alcoholic. Baio flexed his dramatic wings in a number of other tv movies and specials, between comedy seasons. Later, in The Truth about Alex, he took the part of a kid who finds out his best friend is gay, and has to cope with his reactions and other people's speculations about the two of them. The main point of interest for me in this script was simply that he was willing to be in it -- not the safest of parts for someone in his position.

Baio retained his frail kid look for years, though in fact packing some serious biceps; adult, he stayed slender, but with an elusive toughness. His voice, which is one of his great charms, took on a fascinatingly creaky sound, like chronic laryngitis, that lasted well into Charles in Charge, giving something of the effect of a male Katherine Hepburn. From his earliest years on Happy Days he's had an odd, slightly bent-forward-from-the-hips gait, and an endearing near-complete inability to dance; that is, he would attack any dancing a role required, and brazen it through, but he was visibly not the natural dancer that, say, Henry Winkler was, or Erin Moran. He was also no child prodigy actor to begin with, he just learned fast and well once he got his feet under him. I particularly like Chachi's later scenes with Fonzie. Winkler and the almost-grown Baio seem warm and sweet together in a way that goes beyond sentimentality.

In Charles in Charge Baio developed in more subtle ways. He is simply, now, a master at what he does, and that is perhaps where the sense of toughness comes from. He has always played youthful roles, to the point that in one dream-sequence of the 40-years-later variety Charles looks into a mirror and exclaims in amazement, "I finally got facial hair!" Baio plays a boy but in fact he is a man, and the elation of Happy Days, though still apparent, is tempered by unmistakable strength and determination.

Baio's strength is matched by that peculiar flexile rigor of the habitual clown in Willie Aames's Buddy. It is fairly rare for these two types of strength to meet on an equal footing. As Charles says to Buddy in one of his moments of wonder at their friendship, "We have nothing in common. I live in the Temperate Zone, you live in the Twilight Zone." Generally the zoned-out clown will, at least momentarily, reduce the other actor to his straight man. Though Buddy is in many ways central to the show's charm as well as its structure, Baio is so completely responsive to Aames that he keeps whatever they do together a genuine duet. And vice versa -- there's scarcely an instant when Baio is on stage that Aames is not almost tangibly connected to him. Though the last half-dozen shows of the final season were awkward (the writing, mostly), in the main, Charles's charge is this undercurrent between two actors who work terrifically together and make every episode live up to the best they are capable of.

I loved the dense, generous first-season scripts by Michael Jacobs, directed by Alan Rafkin, in which Charles's focus was more strongly on the kids. Their interactions too were very "connected"-feeling, yielding appealing scenes. And one with the parents really snuck up and bowled me over, as they unexpectedly got into an emotional argument with Charles. In the middle of a light comedy, acted the way people really fight, this can give you quite a shock. The impact isn't nearly as great when you know it's coming, but things that only work once are art too. Right?

Most of the stuff in those scripts goes on working. In one, Jason has been taking candid photos for a school assignment, while Douglas obsesses about having to date a girl and how to kiss properly. In the midst of a lot of other stuff going on, Jason, gleeful as only little brothers can be, shouts that he just snapped

Douglas "making out with his pillow!" Douglas, halted in hot pursuit of the Polaroid, flees back up the stairs with a mad cry. I think it should be enshrined in a Hall of Truth.

The Powell family years also have great moments, and continue the sexual derring-do which is the realest political content of this show. There's the sensible parental reaction when young Adam ends up in a college art class where a model -- on camera, though of course shown only from the thigh down -- disrobes. Or there's the one-sided phone conversation as Charles tries to replace Mr. Powell's ruined tape: "Hi, is this Wally's Wax Works? I'm looking for an old recording of Glenn Miller, 'Live at the U.S.O.'....Charles.... Thanks, Wally, you have a nice voice too....No thanks, Wally, I'm looking for a tape, not a relationship.... Why do I have to come down there?....Forget it, Wally, it's over. I need my space."

One episode had moments that epitomized the worst and best of Charles in Charge. A 60s radical living under a false identity is about to be exposed. Charles says, "The 60s and 70s were tough times, and she was young...she made a mistake." Burning down a ROTC building during the Vietnam war was not a mistake, it was a political act. That they all know this may be why the scene plays as such a shuck. But political correctness about lawbreaking is a bitch to achieve on tv. Even when it was happening, even when tv reporters were (to their lasting benefit) being clubbed and teargassed, the shows "about" the Vietnam issues had to toe the legal line. And laws against incitement are nothing compared to what the FCC could nail you with. And the FCC is nothing next to the wrath of Nnetwork. Nnetwork bounced the Smothers Brothers and Monty Python at the height of their popularity, because even the ad dollar bows before the greater need to keep dissent and disrespect off the airwaves: that ad dollar goes down with the ship if monied interests are torpedoed.

C-in-C, of course, was a network show for only one year, but independent stations buying a syndicated program are not looking for trouble either.

The real point of the episode isn't its overt politics but the moment when Scott Baio and Willie Aames appear in some of the best drag I have ever seen -- and please call to mind at this time that I've worked through two Halloweens at the San Francisco AIDS Foundation with a staff full of charter members of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. The first drag entrance was terrific. I wish they could have played it on through, but they didn't quite dare -- the script dissolved into masculinity gags, and the scene, that could have been so fantastic, turned ordinary. Still, it was one great moment.

Most fun of these years were some of the fantastical episodes. A foreign investor buys the house the Powells rent and they're going to have to leave, and Charles's nightmare about it incorporates all the minor fusses of the day: Jamie, feeling persecuted, becomes Jamiella, scrubbing the floor and wanting to go to the ball and the disillusioned Adam does a wonderful world-rejecting punk rocker. Enter Buddy in Cavalier frills, as the new owner of the house, Count Buddence de Lembeck. Jamiella demands that Charles be her Fairy Godfather; so, in his p.j.'s, he goes out to the kitchen to make the Count an offer he can't refuse. Coming through the other side of the kitchen's swing door, his costume has changed and he's acquired henchmen: he's Don Charles-o, the (Fairy) Godfather, complete with Brando mannerisms and stuffed cat.

I can't help it. I love this stuff. I think everybody's favorite show of the second series is the two-parter where Charles (whose signature tune, when our local station assigned "appropriate" songs for each show's

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interludes, went "Goody Two-, Goody Two-, Goody Goody Two-Shoes --") is hit on the head and becomes Chaz Lamborghini, greaser extraordinaire. In what might strike some as a positively joyous departure from his usual role Baio acquires slicked-back hair, a quick wife named Tiffany, a taste for beer and tattoos, and a heavy accent. By his clothes the somehow still lovable Chaz pegs vanished Charles as "some freakin' fruitcake Count of Monte Cristo". He calls the bully Lyle "dis mameluke" and demands of his mom, "Why you gotta bust my onions?" (The show was so much fun they did another, as is the sad way of sequels, Chaz II wasn't quite up to the same standard.) I would really, really love to see Scott Baio play a role like that "straight". But then, I would love to see Scott Baio play just about anything.

For a show so critically overlooked, Charles in Charge had an impressive rollcall of guest stars -- Mindy Cohn, Richard Sanders, Michael Dorn, Tony Dow, Justin Whalin, John Astin, Sally Struthers, Jack Riley, Don Most, Jerry Van Dyke and Rue McClanahan, that I can remember -- and not one of them could outclass the regulars. Baio, on the other hand, guesting as a boisterous old friend on Full House, blew their cast out of the water. The outburst of applause at his first appearance lasted so long it was downright embarrassing. His much more subdued character on Out of This World allowed the regulars to escape with their lives, in a jokey script in which, as I recall, the fantasy prince -- Baio -- slightly dismisses that "terrible" tv show, Charlemagne in Charge. This last is reminiscent of a daintily played C-in-C scene in which Charles refers to what the fan magazines say about his favorite star. "Not," he backtracks suddenly, "that I ever read the fan magazines." This delicate little poignard to the gizzard of Hollywood snobbery is one of my favorite lines in the series.

It might not come home as pointily if you're unaware that Baio, in his day, was the reigning fanmag cover-boy and likely has a closetful of the stuff. That he's made a tenacious career despite that social handicap bodes ill for the judgement of critics who've ignored him. Just now turned 30, he's already had the 20 years' tempering Meisner prescribed; at this point the only limits on what he could achieve as an actor are the boundaries of his own aspiration. It's saddening to think of him bereft of Aames and Callahan, as it was to see the Pembroke cast disperse, hard to trust in his finding actors who can meet him as strongly and skillfully as his co-stars have in the past, writers who can give him enough to do. But moving on -- something us military brats and temp workers can relate to -- is implicit in being an actor, and now that performance, like writing, can be preserved, the essence of this -- to me -- most mysterious of arts lives on though the company's disbanded.

There are too many tv shows for all of them to get a fair shake from the critics. Still, too many, like Charles in Charge, are judged by a single procrustean standard of drama and overt message, leaving other values of artistry unnoticed. Audiences, not critics, must be the consolation of those who create such shows. Charles in Charge will continue to have an audience as long as there are those to whom art speaks directly through performance, as well as through the frequently less potent intermediary of screenwritten moral precepts.

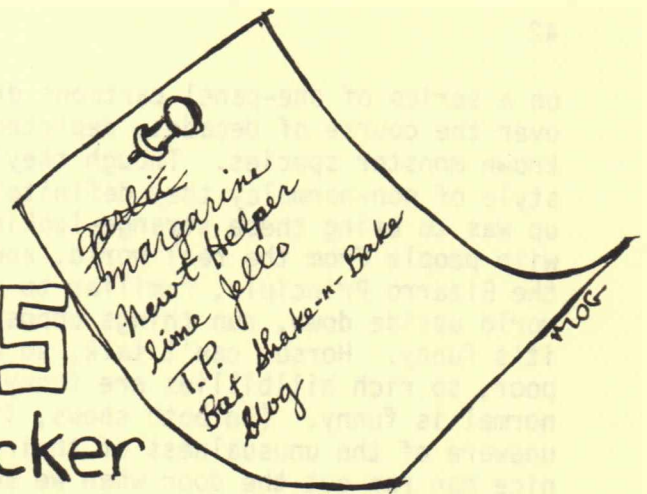
TELEVISION QUOTE OF THE YEAR

"If you're physically fit, you're three to four times less likely to die than those who aren't."

Fox News Extra, November 2, 1989

MONSTERS and MESSAGES

Candi Strecker



The funny thing about tv shows is that they're full of so many messages. Sometimes the messages they intend to beam out to you aren't quite the ones you walk away with. And sometimes the good messages they send out are so revolutionary that they have to be buried very deeply, so that the people who put them in probably can't be sure those messages will ever get out and do their good work on the other side. On the receiving end, I'm never sure if the good messages I'm picking up were deliberately put there or just happened to exist as a chance by-product, like planting trees because they're beautiful and getting more oxygen in your environment as a bonus. Sitcoms are especially fun to look at in terms of messages, because on the surface, they aren't supposed to have messages. Which is bunk, of course. A lot of revolutionary thought in the last score of years has involved pointing out the subtle messages inherent just in depicting situations as representing normality -- that the real life they show is appropriate life. Mom Is In The Kitchen is one message. Mom Is In The Office is another message, although the people doing the pointing-out usually don't get around to pointing out that this new message is a message, because it's the thing that they have a stake in presenting as appropriate life. I could probably talk about the various messages hidden in American sitcoms all the livelong day, but to me the most interesting sitcoms of all, messagewise, are two that have approximately the same silly premise and that, coincidentally, were broadcast during the same years of the 1960s. Because what's wonderful about these two superficially superficial shows is that when you take out your message decoder ring and look closely at them, the likeness disappears and they couldn't be more different in their messages.

The two shows I'm thinking about are The Addams Family and The Munsters, which ran from September 1964 thru September 1966. The premise they shared was that of a family composed of various types of monsters, like vampires, witches and "Frankensteins", and the problems they would have in dealing with normal suburban neighbors. Cute stuff, the networks must have said. Lots of opportunities for double-takes and reaction shots. Why, the scripts almost write themselves. Plus there's this undercurrent in shows like these (and lots of the other "fantasy" shows of the time, like Bewitched), that they were really a way of safely speaking, in code, about the taboo topic of immigrant identity and assimilation, and thus a way of doing ethnic jokes. It was touchy business to write a show in which a Mama Goldberg or Mama Pappadopolous embarrasses her son by making some delicacy from the Old Country for him to take to the school bake sale. But you could have Mrs. Munster giving Eddie a batch of eye-of-newt cupcakes to take to the bake sale, since there's no Munster Pride Committee to threaten to boycott the network for not presenting a sufficiently positive image of Munsters (nor, for that matter, an Anti-Munster Assimilation League to protest that Munsters are appearing at all).

The Munsters' family members were clearly drawn from well-known monster types: Grandpa is a vampire, Eddie is a werewolf, and so on. The Addams Family, based

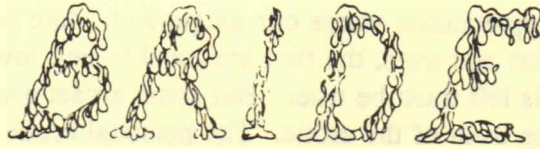
on a series of one-panel cartoons drawn by Charles Addams for The New Yorker over the course of decades, depicted a family whose members don't belong to any known monster species. Though they're not literally ghouls, in their macabre style of non-normalcy they definitely seem ghoulish. Either way, the set-up was to bring these strange-looking, strange-acting characters into contact with people from the real world, and watch the normals freak. Laffs ensue. It's the Bizarro Principle, familiar to all readers of Superman comics: turn the world upside down, run things opposite to the rules we all know, and presto, it's funny. Horses can't talk, so a talking horse is funny. Hillbillies are poor, so rich hillbillies are funny. Monsters aren't normal, so monsters acting normal is funny. (In both shows, it was essential that the monster families be unaware of the unusualness of their behavior. "My goodness, I wonder why the nice man ran out the door when we served the bat-wing casserole?")

Under all the gags and cobwebs, there was one big difference between the two shows. The Munsters were terribly anxious to be normal, to be accepted. Clearly, if you could follow the characters down the years to the present, by now they'd be indistinguishable from their neighbors. Herman would have gotten plastic surgery to remove those bolts from his neck, Lily would have given up her gravesclothes gown for a nice Liz Claiborne jogging suit, and Eddie would be blow-drying his hair to hide his widow's-peak hairline. Their haunted house would have been remodeled into a pastel country-living style Victorian. Now and then they'd have an embarrassed little laugh together as they looked at pictures of themselves from 1964. In a word, the Munsters would now be assimilated.

But not the Addamses. They didn't seem to behave strangely due to some kind of genetic or ethnic heritage, but just because they liked acting that way. They weren't monsters by birth, but by choice! (It just happened to be a choice they shared with their blood relatives.) They too were startled when visitors ran screaming from their house, but unlike the Munsters, they never took it personally. The category of monsters that the Addamses fit into was eccentrics. And the secret message I took from this tv show was: in the privacy of your own home, among your own family, you can have things just the way you like them. You could set up your model railroad with explosive charges under the bridges; you could use funny 1920s telephones or listen to harpsichord music or wear a velvet smoking jacket. You could keep the thorns and throw away the roses, if you wished. You could be madly in love with your spouse and dress in strange outfits just because those were the outfits the two of you liked to see each other in. There could be insane Victorian furniture and mounted trophy heads and spiked iron fences and children named Wednesday and Pugsley, which is exactly what I want to name my children if ever I have any.

And the punch line of the whole show was that they were so happy! It wasn't the simpy kind of "give me a hug honey, aren't we lucky to have such a wonderful warm family" end-of-episode gush they write into conventional sitcoms. The Addamses were happy in the middle of the show too, repeatedly, and every time they did the things they liked they'd exchange looks of manic delight. Look, I finally blew up the bridge just right! Doesn't the new tombstone make a wonderful garden ornament! Guess what, dear, there's a full moon tonight and we can all sit on the roof and bask in its pale beams! Their lives were theirs to live. The Munsters were slaves (like the Bundys and the Bunkers and the Ricardos) and the Addamses were free. It was just that simple. End of message. And I think that a little bit of what I am today, I am because of it.





OF PEACH FUZZ

Earlier this year some fan magazines insisted Johnny Depp was leaving 21 Jump Street and that the show was quietly seeking a new star. There've certainly been warning signs: numerous scripts this season had references to Hanson wanting to quit the force, being too old for high school undercover, etc. At least one magazine, though, printed a statement from Stephen J. Cannell, head of the whole production empire from which Jump Street springs, to the effect that Depp has three years of a seven year contract to fulfill of which, had they not been friends, Cannell could have enforced the requirement that Depp appear in every single episode... When a velvet-glove quote like that filters down to the teen press, it's like ash falling over Iowa; you know there's St. Helens to pay somewhere. In a tv interview, Depp -- who says it's two more years, not three -- spoke unflatteringly of contractual obligations as his reason for continuing on the show. Elsewhere he admitted to counting the days. Anyone who's worked too long at a job that chafes can empathize.

It jolts you to realize how pivotal one individual's face and persona are to dozens of jobs and even careers in television, how much is resting on one person's shoulders. Unless you really like your work, it must be heartsinking to realize that that person is you.

It took me a while -- what can I tell you, I'm slow -- but I finally grasped that a Johnny Depp not doing Jump Street was not only a Johnny Depp unavailable every week or two on tv, but also a Johnny Depp no longer in Vancouver. A job on a set in Vancouver had gradually come to form my vision of blessedness. Bigtime tv work without having to live in L.A. -- not unlike the Catholic concept "Paradise without Purgatory". But lovely Vancouver (as I imagined it), temperate yet poignant of clime, foreign yet not alien, mountain-cupped and lake-bedewed, suddenly reverted to another damp city north of Seattle, in a country where even descriptions of intercourse are illegal.

Chagrin. Facing it: no matter HOW good, how worthy, how well-acted 21 Jump Street without him might be, it would have lost its magic. It's been said that it could easily survive without Depp, as it is an ensemble show. But the overall construction is a funnel, channelling attention to the character Hanson. It isn't unknown for this sort of plan to go a-gley (Happy Days the most patent example, with Henry Winkler moving from sixth billing to first), and you have to give the IS producers credit for seeing Depp as what they needed at that focal spot; they cast another actor in the part, realized they'd got it wrong, made a serious pitch for Depp and got him.

If I don't think it can survive without its beautiful boy, am I saying that the fine things I perceived in the show were just illusions brought on by besottedness?

No. It's in fact the work of art that is disrupted if Depp leaves, a work of erotic art in the genre, if not quite the league, of Donatello's David -- the sculptor's mastery would still be evident if all that was left were Goliath's head, but it would be a hell of a lot less interesting as a piece of art. Art that makes such heavy use of the erotic nature of artist and audience is a fascinating proposition at which art criticism has turned up its masculine little nose for far too long.

Info and quotes from: SuperStars, Showbiz Today, Johnny Depp by Randi Reisfeld, US, Movieline, Wow!, Bop, Interview, Sassy, Star, YM, Movies, Time, The New Breed, TV Guide, Vanity Fair, Good Morning America, Teen Beat, People, 16, American Film, Faves, Modern Screen, Teen, Rolling Stone, Newsweek.

* Forget big, white, hunky. This is the little bronze kid in the funny hat.

That's because critics suspect erotic appreciation warps our judgement. And the erotic ideal is elusive, so the artist may pretend, start to pry apart art and truth, the first irrevocable step toward schlock. If eroticism is eliminated, criticism reasons, then what is left must be truer. But some artists persist in preferring to concentrate on, or at least incorporate, the truth of the erotic. The personal erotic vision is exceedingly delicate and difficult to manage, and unless the erotic concept is kept absolutely true to the artist's unique soul, the hairline frontier between immortal art and dashboard kitsch zips smartly to the left and leaves you in the litterbins of time. I have never seen a photograph of Donatello's David that looked anything but imbecile. So fine is the edge of Donatello's intent that the most infinitesimal alterations of photography shatter the David's equilibrium. Therefore to come upon this statue is always to encounter a previously unknown work of great art, even an unknown level of art's possibility: sex stilled to the quietude and poise of the absolute.

Having once seen this, you know forever that it is a lie that eroticism can only contaminate the "real" concerns of art.

Which brings us, through rather celestial bypaths, back to the question of whether 21 Jump Street could survive without Johnny Depp. Unless its intent changes radically, I don't think it can. The show was designed as a setting for an erotic gem. The stone pried out, the surrounding precious metal loses not its value or beauty, but its purpose.

But the brilliance of the setting is also indispensable. The show has become aimless and unfocused this season, and even if Depp stayed, unless the writers and cast and crew could be made happier and re-energized, it might be best for work to stop now, while it still has some integrity.

At least if Jump Street folded its creators could occupy themselves with the need to Control-Alt-Delete and re-boot Booker. That show is ailing, and some of the doctoring it's received's like to put it in its grave.

The program upsets me. I'm afraid that's going to show in how I write about it. Stephen J. Cannell himself wrote the first script, setting up broad outlines for developing relationships, which subsequent writers, alas, seldom followed through on. The series was fortunate to acquire a couple of Carleton Eastlake's excellent shoot-'em-ups. He brought the show finally alive with his script "Flat Out", seventh in the series, where Booker nabs a wacked-out witness in another city and has to get her back home to testify. "Flat Out" also contains, in the final shootout by the vault, a couple of the best cuts in the existence of television. I don't usually notice editing, and editors' names go by too fast in the credits to catch; I'm ashamed of ignoring it the way I do. Maybe someone else will do justice to its role in these shows, someday. But this particular moment is so perfect anyone would notice.

Booker is what is known as a "vehicle" for Richard Grieco, and on its bumper was the plea "Don't honk -- I'm pedalling as fast as I can!" "Flat Out" put an engine under the hood. It took Booker from his showcase position front-and-center in an expanse of empty black velvet and set him where he belongs: to one side of a markedly different personality, reacting to it. It's not as valuable as what he was able to do in a Jump Street situation, but it works.

Booker was originally conceived as a commentator. For that character to survive, deeply-realized, antiplastic, self-absorbed personalities must exist for him to comment on -- not necessarily overtly but in the subtleties of jarring language, expectations, appearance. Art and ecology have this in common, that philistines understand neither the one nor the other, unable to see past the little dollar signs lighting up their eyes; when the simple dependency of human beings upon the oxygen created by wetlands and forests escapes them, you can't expect a grasp of subtle fantasy, of the way a good character is upheld by ties to surrounding roles. Panic and puzzlement ensue when their tropical vine won't transplant to a desert. In the case of Booker, a lot of Jump Street potting soil was imported in the form of guest appearances and script ties, but the place was simply not moist and wormy enough. "Flat Out" gives a clear plan of how this little garden ought to be laid out and cared for -- not in the script's explosions and gunfire but in its warmth, density, kookiness and opportunities for Richard Grieco to do what he does best: react.

But the model is unheeded. A couple of fun shows about computer hackers and B.B. King's guitar (the latter nabbed the terrific Gedde Watanabe as its guest star) and an excellent hockey story by Jump Street's Glen Morgan and James Wong can't offset the direction the show is sliding in -- as a dreadful example, the deliciously vile executive Chick Sterling turned in a single episode from a sleazy prick to someone Booker

likes to think of as a father! Yes, it was indeed to barf. The character Suzanne in "Flat Out" was so obviously great that they decided to make a few minor changes (her attire, her language, her behavior, her social class and her goals) and replace Booker's secretary with her, a mind-numbingly awful idea that destroyed her tactical power as an independent agent, besides dumping unceremoniously the nice secretary he already had. My notes on these episodes skid into invective, but the gist is that they are wasting Richard Grieco, this wonderful natural resource, they had a chance at another Jump Street and they're making Mannix and, quote, "What the hell are they doing?" They did restore Suzanne to life and fix things a bit after that (with, conspicuously, NO producer credited!), as Jan Eliasberg's recent "Father's Day" proves.

If the show is less than we'd hoped for, there are extenuating circumstances. Virtually every producer and writer on Booker is producing or writing 21 Jump Street at the same time. So, parallèlement:

If the third season was as stressful for everyone as it obviously was for some, it may explain the losses Jump Street suffered this year. The absence of script-doctor John Truby as a story editor, Eric Blakeney as a producer, and several of their good directors, following the disappearance from the credits last year of writers Jonathan Lemkin and Clifton Campbell, with the fact that everyone also put in time on Booker, must create enough purely logistic hassle to getting 21 Jump Street made; add the psychological difficulty of boinging back and forth from one show to the other, knowing one might be slated for extinction, and trying to accommodate to the alien fancies of newcomers like Thania St. John, Gary Rosen, David Stenn, and the Barbers. For these new writers it was very difficult to achieve, let alone extend, the reach of a series this unusual.

To give some idea of how hard it is to attribute any one gaucherie or brilliant line, the typical Jump Street will credit one to three writers plus an occasional story contributor or two, two producers, a co-producer, a supervising producer, an executive producer, a co-executive producer and two to four story editors. That noted, the team of Morgan and Wong most reliably recreates the tone of third season Jump Street, first having done their best to patch together the logical tatters of last year's finale into an orderly, if basically loopy, rationale for springing Hanson and giving Booker the boot. Everybody in the audience knows, thanks to broad hints in "Lōc'd Out (Part II)", that the crooked cop Hanson supposedly shot was actually offed by the cop's own partner; when Booker realizes this, the only scheme he can come up with to get the embittered Penhall to listen is to free Hanson from prison on a phony next-of-kin funeral pass; and in order to provide a dramatic meeting, the guards usher him in all the way to Hanson's cell! As I've entered a medium-security prison a couple of times, my eyebrows kinda spocked at this, but okay. For this stunt Booker is busted to microfilm clerk in the police archives, and resigns, his new series slouching toward Vancouver to be born. The whole thing is done with some marvelous touches, such as the three searching through Penhall's videotape collection for a clue, hitting characteristically unlabeled female body-builder contests, Monster Truck shows, and Rocky and Bullwinkle. I must admit, though, my favorite moment owed as much to advertising genius as to writers or directorial care. As Hanson returned to jail at the end of his 24-hour pass, the show went straight from a molto pathetic shot of him in handcuffs looking up at the high prison walls like an orphan, to a black screen with the white words "What is sexy?"

I personally fell on the floor, but my low tastes are known. I hope the producers were as entertained.

The second show, Bill Nuss's gambling script, was well-done but is not a "Great" JS. It's occurred to me one way you know a series Has It is you immediately start sorting it into "Great", "Classic" episodes vs. okay, daily-bread episodes. "Amok Time" and "The Trouble with Tribbles" vs. "Arena" and "Assignment Earth". "Eternal Flame", a return-of-previously-unmentioned-love-of-Hanson's-life script, is a bump down to very conventional tv; nothing other shows wouldn't gladly use, but just not 21 Jump Street par. The "first one's free" marketing technique with, of all drugs, LSD, makes you want to gnaw off your cerebral cortex to escape, as does the "I love you, you love me, therefore the only right thing to do is go away to Find Myself" tidying of the romance.

"Come from the Shadows" earnestly tries to get across a hint of the infamy of U.S. relations to El Salvador. "God Is a Bullet" is a Truby tale of a dictatorial high school principal gradually eroding rights in the name of Lawnorder, loved the hall squad's big "SM" armbands ("Safety Monitor", mm-hm), and I was much struck with a scene which, by apparent sheer chance, in a script not focussed on race, brought together three

unconnected characters each of whom happened to be black. Rack your brains for the last time you saw that on a "non-black" show. Wong and Morgan wrote "Old Haunts in the New Age" and it was about here I began to suspect the season's titles of reflecting perceptions about the series and writers' problems therewith (the season premiere that finished off Booker was titled "Draw the Line") rather than the episodes' content. In this one, the cops exhume the dead body under the chapel for a while. It's an old-JS/new-JS Halloween mix of psychics, skeletons, UFOs, a costume dance, a firebug and in-jokes, and it is really a lot of fun.

"Out of Control" unfortunately is, a tale of Rich Thrill-Seeking Teens. The two sides of the plot are well connected and merge smoothly at the end, but a girl balancing between two speeding cars for kicks turned me off early -- my kid brother used to do this kind of thing on the way home from gigs, it gives me the creeps to see it demonstrated for the teenage millions. (It's swiped from a still stupider scene in Footloose. JS does have sticky fingers that way (as does Booker), though often they steal in dialogue with, rather than emulation of, the movies, as in "God Is a Bullet"'s reply to The Principal and its ilk.) It's an episode where you have spare mind to notice Mario Van Peebles, a rather "fancy" director who did gorgeous moments on "High High". He likes to shoot through things. A lot. You're no sooner done admiring a pan through three consecutive glassed sides of a hamburger stand when...he goes back and shoots through them again. I could handle it all except the conversation through the turning fan. He also likes prominent lighting effects -- to where I flashed on him as a Buckaroo Banzai alien: John Manycookies -- and sometimes it does get a little distracting, but the deserted roller-coaster at night really is beautiful.

"Stand By Your Man" is another title reflecting a little grimly on its script. True to the season's vertiginous tendency, Officer Judy Hoffs herself is raped; Holly Robinson acted it well -- she shows anger better than almost any woman on U.S. tv -- and it's a well-meant episode. But it turns glaring light on the fundamental sexism of Jump Street structure: Hoffs has no female friends, no family, no outside life at all, so the only characters she can interact with are her male colleagues. Few rape survivors feel like trusting men right off the bat, but it's all she's got. There aren't even any cops' girlfriends left -- all sex has, as I feared last ish, been eliminated from the guys' lives. At the end Hoffs is made to say, "I just don't understand how men and women got so screwed up", an egregious copout of a line that treats women and men as jointly responsible for the problem.

Without sex, the incidence of gun use increased -- seven episodes with on-screen shootings since "Fathers and Sons" pronounced the new celibacy, plus at least three off-screen, and other assorted mayhems. "Mike's P.O.V.", for example, is a unique Truby script entirely from the point of view of a sociopathic teenage hit man. Off-screen executions punctuate "Wheels and Deals", which starts well on Booker and ends in an unconvincing motorcycle trip on JS; true, there are a few immortal lines, and they jail the extremely naughty magnate who framed Hanson last year. "Parental Guidance Suggested" looks at child abuse -- from a distance. Which is about how we all tend to look at it, through our windows, uncertainly. One of the best scripts of the season, if you omit the incongruous tag, Morgan and Wong's "Things We Said Today" essentially warns kids to try other avenues before turning their parents in to the police on drug charges, as the meatgrinder of the criminal justice system shreds a boy's already mournful life. "Research and Destroy" amuses as it stereotypes, involving ultrabright college students in a silly synthetic-heroin story with side orders of Chinese student revolution and inept romance. Highlights are Johnny Depp's endearing nerd role and Grant Heslov as Hoffs's uninvited suitor.

"Change of Heart" is Jump Street's lesbian story (at last). It would be interesting to know if this is series television's first lesbian kiss. Michelle Ashford tried to hit the major problems of coming out in high school, with a particularly good sketch of a noxious counselor. There are problems -- for some reason, the murder is made practically the fault of the victim's lover, and hip music over the murder scene is in bad enough taste to constitute a misogynistic statement. On the amusing side, the world's most unusual and spacious dyke bar is peopled with dressy ladies who immediately hit on any newcomer (in your dreams). This would have been a chance to inject a few major lesbian cultural characteristics -- flannel shirts and shyness, for a start -- but in addition to needing quick dialogue to advance the plot, JS may have felt between a rock and a hard place in trying to portray lesbians without reinforcing stereotypes (They Wear Men's Clothes). The B story is an example of how subplots can injure a script; striking it could have left room for cultural research comparable

to that done for this writer's very good third-season gang story, "Lōc'd Out". It's good that they did the show, and everything is survivable except the use -- at least five times -- of the word "confused" to describe gay teens' awareness of their wants. It's a panic-bar on the political emergency exits, placation to the Moral Moronity.

The Gray Panthers would have a choice phrase or two about the Senile Oldster bits, but "Back from the Future" nevertheless immediately takes its place among the Classic episodes. Peter DeLuise debuted as a director on David Stenn's simple interview format story of a young cop 50 years hence who wants to set up a Jump Street style operation. He finds Hanson in an old-folks' home cubicle, blasting out loud rock and roll and rabidly protecting his privacy -- an amusing comment on how Johnny Depp's personality has more and more insinuated itself into the Hanson character. The science fiction touches are nice. Reagan's bonzoid views on Japanese Hollywood buy-ins are carried to their logical conclusion in this future: all signs are printed in Japanese as well as English, and it's remarked that now Hollywood movies are dubbed into English from Japanese originals. The makeup runs wild, at least on Penhall and Hanson -- Hanson looks more like 100 than 70, and for all I can tell it might not even be Johnny Depp under all those appliances, though whoever it was did a marvelous job. The charm of aging makeup, for me, is to be able to study a familiar face in a novel mode, so I was a touch crestfallen, but it's a fine fun zoom through the future into the past: as promised by the title, the show actually ends up going back through old Jump Streets via memories. Footage includes early episodes I still long to see. I loved Sal as janitor-turned-millionaire displaying videos of all the "Banducci Dynasty" great-grandkids blowing out their cheeks like fish. The screen is set in a little "Geddes" brand video device the size of a pocket calculator (David Geddes is Jump Street's current director of photography). The episode ends with a wonderful treat of out-takes under the closing credits, mugging, kissing, a weird beautiful DeLuise ape imitation, and never-before-seen loonery of the kind fans mortgage their souls for.

The most important episode of the season, "2245" follows the last day of a boy on Death Row, a very, very affecting piece that makes its points on racism and poverty quietly. If I don't quite believe the case as outlined would get the death sentence, the episode is nevertheless true to the fact that the Final Solution has always been applied arbitrarily and with racial/cultural bias. Reviving a remarkable character originally written by Jonathan Lemkin, writers Michelle Ashford, Glen Morgan and James Wong created a deathly still script to convey the dignity of reality as compared to jive. In the last act they and director Kim Manners practiced the Zen of getting out of the way of a story whose power is inherent. The result is a most moving work of television art. Rosie Perez is enchanting in her ticked-off moments -- it's that New York accent -- and aligns perfectly with the eery uncomplicated honesty Josh Richman created as her lover, Ronnie Siebok. And of course I could not but be charmed by her four-word take on Hanson's character.

The episode has one psychological impossibility: Hanson would have to be ten times the bastard he is to knowingly let someone go to Death Row for something he didn't do, and then come around asking the guy to denounce the path of crime on video. But the script's mute rebuke to the Cagney version makes even that acceptable. Frankly, the episode is so good you don't really care what it does to the regular characters. You have to see "2245" to believe how good a show For Girls can be. In its best moments 21 Jump Street has got art the way some people get religion. Now raise your hand if you think it's going to get an Emmy for it.

Kareem Abdul-Jabbar was featured in "Hi Mom", a sturdy Nuss story on college-basketball corruption. "A Womp-Bomp-Aloobomp, Aloop-Bamboom" is a bridging episode with a surprisingly uncouth teaser for Morgan and Wong, in which the caricature of campus commies is far enough off to tilt the whole script on its ear. The episode's main purposes seem to be to cameo John Waters and to get Hanson and Penhall into position for the El Salvador story that follows. It has some arresting bits -- Penhall and Hanson hitch-hiking with the leader of the Workers' Party, and a good ole boy cheerily inviting them into his car as long as they aren't "a commie, a queer, or a cop", resulting in a mass pause on everyone's part; a lovely little Steven Williams dance moment; the always-welcome reappearance of Sal Jenco. The script assures us that people become radical leftists just to needle their parents, and polishes off in hopeless confusion any future attempt to identify the city Jump Street takes place in. At the Chapel it's cold enough to freeze water indoors, and on the bus to Florida Penhall remarks that they've passed Baltimore; yet Hanson yells he was in Folsom Prison,

which is inarguably in California. Previous shows (snowfalls; ice on "Renner's Pond"; the Chapel having once been part of the Underground Railway, according to "Old Haunts...") also rather argued against California. Probably we should locate the program in Bellona and let it go at that.

"La Bizca" takes them to El Salvador looking for Penhall's deported wife. I'm pretty sure they should have heroically resisted the "stinking badges" line, but there are some outstanding moments in the Barber and Barber script, as when barefoot Hanson is expected to take the boots of a dying comrade-in-arms, or in a sudden graphic murder scene, and especially the norteamericanos' reaction to the scraped poverty of a cooperative farm: "How do they stand it. They've been fighting for so long and all they have is this." When their prison door is opened during a fire, Penhall and Hanson back into the closest corner and cling together like children, and this is good, really good -- I only suspect they should have been near that scared all along. The best proof that the show said something important was that the U.S. Armed Forces refrained from sponsoring this episode.

"Last Chance High" bugs me because none of the episodes I've seen have ever dealt more than antsy with the issue of abuse, never showing the reality of it -- kids who look like they've been in a car crash, kids left retarded or crippled -- then this one goes and posits a kid who says she's been beaten when she hasn't. But I really liked the parenthetical writing, and the originality of the B story. Of special note are Penhall's terribly appealing new adopted kid, Clavo, and Hanson's dancer leap into Penhall's arms.

"Shirts and Skins" is characteristic of Barber and Barber in its serious subject matter -- American Nazis. The teaser, a family funeral, was extremely interesting, as were certain other scenes, in attempting to show the individual bigots as basically ordinary people with the standard set of emotions and reactions.

Gary Rosen's "How I Saved the Senator" is another instant Classic, Jump Street's Rashomon, a comic tour de force in which Holly Robinson gets to sing (very nicely), Peter DeLuise gets to be James Bond, Sal Jenco gets to be a bald gangster and the hero of a bathroom slice-&-dice, Steven Williams gets to ride into the sunset, Johnny Depp gets to be Charlie Chaplin, and Dustin Nguyen takes off in the kind of straight-faced satire that, if anyone gave him the chance, might be his secret forte: he plays a kitchen-fu adept whose Tibetan master's childhood nickname for him was "Dung-Beetle", and -- well, you get the idea. He's beautiful in the combat scenes, as he really does know how to do all that stuff.

"Rounding Third" is a good Rosen parental-kidnapping script that shows the only possible direction for JS if Depp should leave and the program survive. The story is serious without melodrama, and supported rather than subplotted, rich with little character-touches. Tony Dakota, who plays Clavo, is surely the most talented and adorable tot actor since Freddie Bartholomew, and DeLuise is wonderful with him. I really like Peter DeLuise's Penhall...a Penhall-centered series could fly, with the right writers. A Boston friend who never watches tv was shanghaied into seeing this episode at someone's house. "Mog," she told me, "you were right. 21 Jump Street is really good!" I'm glad she didn't catch "Blackout" instead.

"Blackout", about basketball players who first rape a woman in a park and then run rampant through a power outage at their school, is probably the most graceless episode the show's ever done. I know; I know there are women braindead enough to squirm into their spandex and head out for a midnight jog in a deserted park, alone, without an Uzi. I don't like it, but I know it. What I don't know and don't believe is that there's a whole middle class, white (so white even their basketball team is white), suburban school full of teachers and administrators whose lights going out would make them cower behind closed doors expecting their students to re-enact Lord of the Flies. Do you remember your high-school math teachers? Or that Amazon fallback in tenth-grade biology? Gimme a break, Jake. Worse than the reign of terror, if possible, is the mawkish way it's brought to a halt. That the rape section is referring to an actual well-known case strikes me as exploitative in the most repugnant sense of the word. Johnny Depp charted new waters faking getting his fingers cut off by a table saw, but I'm sorry, the show just had few other redeeming features. They must have been in an awful hurry when they made it.

"Everyday Is Christmas" is a good Morgan and Wong script rumored to be debuting "the new Johnny Depp", a young recruit unwittingly caught up in police corruption. Hm. Can't see it, myself.

Sometimes I'll watch an episode the second time and find it was better than its first impression. First impressions of this season, though, have usually involved disappointment. The Booker/Jump Street

entanglements are enough to explain this, including the very fact of losing the Booker character, who gave almost all the other characters so many chances to develop. Depp's intermittent absence is very harmful. But there is also a definite impression of the discouragement that results from interference with the creative talents, as in the banning of cop sex from the show. The heart has gone out of the effort. A lot of people tell me they felt the same let-down about the third season in comparison to the first and second, but I can't agree. That third season showed some beautiful and sophisticated work -- dialogue like that of "A.W.O.L." doesn't come along every day on tv, and the teaser to "What About Love?" is close to perfect. The season was rife with Classic stories -- "Woolly Bullies", "Fun with Animals", "Hell Week", "Lōc'd Out" -- and good subjects: worker solidarity in "The Blu Flu", teenage birth control in "Whose Choice Is It, Anyway?", high school sports ethics in "Coach of the Year". "Nemesis" and "Next Victim" were both interesting and unusual. Almost all the shows, in fact, were much above tv average, and almost every one had its unforgettable moments (the shot down through the chain basketball net in "High High", the air-pillow scene in "The Dragon and the Angel", the Hanson/Garrett fight and Penhall as Blanche du Bois in "Fathers and Sons", the repo scene between Fuller and Sal in "The Currency We Trade In" as well as Hanson and Garrett's first meeting). And hey, the music was terrific.

Even if all this weren't the case, the third season had one major, major claim to fame. Of the episodes I've seen, 21 Jump Street approached nearest its own form of perfection with the Eric Blakeney script "Swallowed Alive", directed so beautifully by James A. Contner that it's as though only one creative spirit ever touched any aspect of the production. Unforeseen events leave Hanson alone undercover as an inmate of a Youth Authority prison. By dint of extreme brutality in defending himself he takes over leadership of the cell block and is thus given entree to the highest level of drug-dealing, etc., and incidentally learns who committed the murder he was sent in to investigate. Though the scenes urging the reading of great literature as a solution to the inmates' problems in society ring necessarily hollow, the rest of the episode packs in a tremendous amount of awareness about the disaster which is the U.S. penal system, and questions even the validity of the Jump Street premise. The script is intricate and written with love. The guest cast is just terrific. Johnny Depp hits some high points -- the spot where Hanson assigns the defeated leader to toilet-cleaning just could not be done better; over in the blink of an eye, it's original, complex, delicate, a definite "moment".

The script situations are well set up in advance, so they can be executed with some subtlety when their time comes; sometimes I think setting up in advance is the key to all grace in writing. It should strain credibility that a slim gorgeous boy could boss a prison block instead of getting done over every day ghod sends -- though the fact is it has happened, and in a much tougher prison than this underage one, testament to how far a little Attitude can take you. But Blakeney, Contner and Depp together defuse unbelief by well-calculated handling. It's a pleasure to see a story with such potential for disarray turn out so well shaped and under control.

There has been nothing really comparable to this in the fourth season. The most interesting treatments scarcely utilized the Jump Street cast or premise ("Mike's P.O.V.", "2245"), while many of the other scripts are broken into plot/subplot, which tends to interfere with serious development of a story.

Though some of the celebrated first season shows that I've now managed to catch in syndicated rerun definitely don't live up to their reputations, I can see what people miss about the second season. The two-part "Besieged", for example, marked the first guest appearance of strikingly beautiful and gifted Josh Richman, who created a luminous character and with Renee Jones made the double episode an emblem of the show's high ambition. The more closely you watch this performance the more stunning it becomes -- for one thing I'm stunned Richman didn't get snapped up instantaneously to some major starmaker role the same night this episode aired, is everyone in Glitz City comatose? Keep their claws off his hair and stick nets into rivers of lucre, is all they'd need to do. Oh for the casting directors of yesteryear, who could sense star quality when it walked up and bit them on the ankle. Sacrilege, maybe, to point to a remarkable actor in terms of money, but, like the trainer with the 2-by-4 -- first you got to get the mule's attention. Wake up...wake up, somnambulant poor parochial burg, awake! Wake up and smell the currency.

One guest star was not all the second season had worth looking back on. Along with exciting improvements in the writing, some of the earlier acting was more tender, more grave -- epitomized by Depp

in "Orpheus 3.3" clearly reaching for the best, most serious way into each moment. Contner directed "Orpheus 3.3", and just as in "Swallowed Alive" he and Depp keep the character's feet on the ground; even while Hanson's mental gears strip he's convincingly canny at faking out his colleagues. But by episode #43, "Swallowed Alive", the acting is hard-edged, with "Hanson" signatures that didn't exist when "Orpheus 3.3" was made. The cinematography also had a different feel back then. A small example of why devotees find Jump Street special is the graveyard scene at the end of "Orpheus 3.3". Without being obtrusive, this scene is extraordinarily beautiful in color and composition, one of the many details that bring Jump Street closer to movie quality than most tv dreams of venturing. They're part of that rich setting I mentioned, without which the central jewel would gather far less light. James A. Contner is not working with the show this fourth season -- one less contribution to the shimmer.

Last fall an interviewer noted with surprise that despite Depp's popularity with girls Jump Street "is a long way from being mere visual candy floss". It doesn't seem to have occurred to her that what Jump Street is has been responsible for how passionately Depp is perceived; for though the fact that he looks good -- whether in drag or on his knees cleaning toilets -- provides a point of access for millions of viewers to the show's wavery ideology, and though Depp's subtlety of expression and intensity create the miraculous complexities of the Hanson persona, high standards from writers, directors and technicians are what let the character exist so wholly that, in the paradoxical twist of stardom, Hanson creates Depp. A reviewer of Cry-Baby wrote, "Who would have guessed that after all that heavy-handed emoting on 21 Jump Street, Depp could have such a light touch?" Setting aside for a moment her rather peculiar definitions of heavy vs. light, the answer to that rhetorical question is simple: no teenage girl who actually watched the series would have been surprised at anything Depp could do.

Despite their increased expertise, there are still a few challenges to the cast -- and occasionally they illuminate small corners of the scripts with astonishing charm. Any who would understand my insistence on Johnny Depp's potential as an actor (Sanford Meisner said it takes 20 years to make one), I refer to the little scene in "Wheels and Deals" in which suspicious Hoffs asks why Hanson was left in charge when she's the senior officer. This scene could have been handled with his little indifferent look, his little blank flummoxed look, and so on. Instead, it is impossible to adequately describe the grape-eating Lucy Van Pelt superciliousness of his reply: "You're a girl." (Hoffs, gripping a letter opener: "If you don't tell me what's going on here, you too will be a girl.")

Something like a second film debut is occurring for Depp with the release of Cry-Baby. In order to be able to compare it to what he'd done in the past, I finally marched over to a friend's VCR with A Nightmare on Elm Street under my arm, where, alone but for two cats, I really hardly got scared at all. I have a theory why. This is a horror movie whose very premise has to do with being in bed. Not only is dream behavior a less moronic rationale for doing stupid things to maneuver yourself into the villain's clutches -- although I for one am always doing the rational thing in such dreams, i.e., running like hell -- but there is some very interesting stuff going on here with gender roles. Wes Craven is aware of the sexual content of horror and sets up parallels between the playfully assaultive behavior of the first victim's boyfriend and Freddy's cruel attacks. He has Freddy's talons rise up unnoticed between the heroine's spread thighs in the bath, and his tongue poke out of a phone she is talking into later on, but the virginity issues common to horror are absent, or dismissed in her own boyfriend's

CRY-BABY

I don't think Cry-Baby's going to be as big a hit as it should have been. Since I always wanted to see John Waters's movies and never got around to it, I can't very well lament the vanished gross-outs of yesteryear, but Hairspray came on tv and I liked it. So for me what it is that Cry-Baby lacks is not a touch of crass a la Desperate Living, but some of Hairspray's humanity. I'm afraid it's too much of a sketch of a movie to have very broad appeal. Except for those of us who formed an instant rapport with Lenora ("known hussy") Fritchett, there's no audience identification in characters so implacably camp and so -- well, numerous. Waters is talented at distin-

morose line "Morality sucks." as he listens, alone in bed, to the other couple simultaneously orgasm. Unlike the classic horror movie in which women are portrayed as life-incompetents, Elm Street has a heroine who's quick on the uptake, courageous and aggressive. Instead of walking dumbly into the traps of this nightmare (literally) monster, she sets traps for him. And though the movie has a classic just-when-you-thought-it-was-safe ending, the message has been absolutely the opposite of "females are too dumb to live" classicism. I know many, many heroines ultimately survive the horror ordeal, but most, even the far-famed Ripley, act in desperation. This one's downright wily. The mood throughout is one of a girl taking charge of her situation. The role of the sweet dimwit who always does exactly the opposite of what's blatantly essential to do devolves upon her boyfriend, Johnny Depp's character Glen. There are maybe eight male speaking parts other than Freddy: three are neutral (the clergyman, the desk cop, the shrink), being not really involved. ALL of the other five are completely useless when not actually obstructive. Both mothers are more positive characters -- with more lines! -- than the fathers. It would be interesting to know how this reversal affected males in the audience. Glen doesn't get chased, cornered, leered at, menaced in his nightie, etc., so the role's not totally complete, but I wonder if males were more scared than normal and females less so watching it. I was so non-scared I could even appreciate the effects, especially the tremendous Footsteps of Fire scene, wow. Nifty.

Legend has it that when Johnny Depp auditioned, Wes Craven junked his original concept of Glen -- a big blond jock. I think a few shreds remained: "When I get nervous, I eat," says wand-slim Depp, and you have to smile. Failing a torn-negligee scene, it was a stroke of genius to put that heartbreakingly tender little waist into a cutoff t-shirt. I'm certain uncounted thousands of viewers took a whole new slant on eroticism from that outfit.

How did he do, a person who'd never acted in so much as a school play before? Well, he looked sweet, attentive, a touch petrified, and like someone trying extremely hard to do a good job. He did do a good job, if a passing strange one. If you look closely, you notice that Glen, via Depp, became an odd character -- never quite in the picture, mystified: the only one of the teenagers who was still completely a child. Because it isn't accomplished with Hollywood signals (Depp didn't know any) it looks like just a subtle, interesting accident

-- though the script does have him scream "Mommy!" as he dies.

guishing one character from another -- which in itself makes him stand out in Babble-On -- but nobody could've given all these interesting critters room to play in the 80 minutes Cry-Baby runs. Where Hairspray actually had a message, about integration, Cry-Baby seems too busy to make even a deeply-felt fashion statement.

Some of this is because the character we all came to see, Wade "Cry-Baby" Walker, has little time to do more than look at his girl, drop his single tear, and leap into another Drape (hood) vs. Establishment fray, snarling and sneering and hurling epic John Waters dialogue.

In Mr. Waters's Neighborhood you're supposed to fang the odd backdrop, I've got naught against what's there, it's more what isn't: the character has no elbow-room, no moment between the cry-baby and the battler, to really establish his culture. The odd second or so as he vrooms up to petition Polly Bergen for an evening of her grand-daughter's company...more of those and less Battle of the Bands casting-frenzy would've made this a better picture.

But if there's nothing in it that makes you smile, you're just a natural-born grinch. Delicious are the songs of the Squares, the movie's white-blazered doo-wopping bourgeoisie; you may find it hilarious that the tear-drinking scene made it into a PG-13 rating, and the big production number "Please, Mister Jailer" climaxes in a paean to desire the like of which I, at least, have never seen. PG-HA, you might say, as Johnny Depp's tongue slides up the glass wall against the other side of which his girlfriend is gyrating despairingly. But it's true. This is innocence. It's sex as pure impulse toward the good, one absolute YES for the Just Say No

Between Elm Street and Jump Street Depp picked up plenty of signals, along with real strengths. It is interesting to see him tackling that hideous ordeal of the new actor --walking -- in Nightmare, compared to all the difficult body-language type stuff he can do now (like falling down, uh-huh, but I mean seriously guys...) If the show has become tormenting to him, and restrictive, it's still where he became an assertive creator rather than a passive directee.

I must be getting as mellow as an overripe honeydew in my old age. Private Resort was on tv yet again and I decided I'd been wrong to say it was too carelessly made to tell if anyone acted well. It's just, there's a different convention in shooting a movie whose blurbs are likely to feature the term "hi-jinx" and no familiar names. A lot of medium-long shots, a uniformity of tone, that somehow lead the eye to slide along unaided by the brain till caromed off the closing credits. The convention of the close-up is that it directs you to get close to a character, read inner emotions, experience a character's existence. The convention of the semi-silent, beautifully composed extreme long shot is that you are directed to accept art as a supreme value, integrate a film statement into your cosmic outlook, and prepare yourself for an emotional kick in the udder.

A nice shiny middle distance tells you "Relax. Leave the driving to us." A strange glaze kind of bounces you back off if you try to watch too closely. This movie isn't even aspiring to sucker you into emotional involvement by means of its lead's beaux yeux, to judge by male makeup and hairstyles. A movie that wastes its own resources in this way, sailing serenely into the sunset of box office failure, is a puzzle. I am beginning to harbor a theory that financial success depends on a filmmaker's ability to appeal to a female taste. What will a woman find hilarious? If she knows anything about Spanish fly, probably not the idea of a guy slipping into her drink a little something likely to cause vomiting, bloody diarrhea, coma and death. What will a woman find erotic? Probably not a multiplicity of bikinis. Look at any Elvis movie: no matter how many bikinis, the camera will come back to his face like a butterfly to a flower. This camera keeps its distance -- it isn't interested in its young male stars and neither are we. From the female point of view, Private Resort is a libidinal Biafra. We conclude the movie is only intended to attract a male audience. And that the filmmaker's opinion of the male audience is lower than a rattler's rollerskates. The only emotional involvement imaginable is maybe getting a few guys in the mood to make life miserable for their dates.

generation. I loved the way Waters presented the gentle, loyal lust of the Drape boys, even if I have too much grinch blood in my veins to believe it. Cry-Baby's serious politics are in the song lyrics ("I'm guilty till I'm 21, I guess I'm doin' time for bein' young.") where revolutionary thoughts are traditionally glossed as just rock cliches, but even there this sexual joy isn't spoken of, except under the general j.d. axiom "It feels so good when we're bein' bad." Evidently you can get away with almost anything under the American censorship codes, as long as you can pretend it isn't happening -- as long as the evidence of your eyes isn't confirmed by a verbal exegesis.

From hints here and there it seems a lot of story was cut that maybe shouldn't have been, but that's past fixing. By the third time you see Cry-Baby, resigned to never knowing exactly why Mrs. Vernon-Williams evolved from her "hysterectomy pants" speech against juvenile delinquents to wearing a Drape skull-and-crossbones on her corsage, you just thoroughly enjoy what's there. The music actually works; Johnny Depp's sheer courage is humbling; Amy Locane and Traci Lords are wonderful; Patty Hearst is a terrific doting mom and it will be a while before we see another Bunny-Hopping villain as good as Stephen Mailer. What Cry-Baby undeniably has is plenty of talent zigzagged through its throng, and lines that will live forever -- like the one Cry-Baby hands his girl in the make-out scene, telling her he's an orphan, "And orphans have special needs."

The (Minnesota) audience didn't laugh -- maybe because he's actually being such a perfect little macho Galahad, teaching her to French kiss ("If you don't like it, I promise I'll stop.") and apologizing for putting his hand on her breast. Requiescat in pace, '50s.

But I also cackled alone when

Johnny Depp has thoughtfully called it "possibly the stupidest movie ever made". Personal involvement must excuse such hubris; there are much, much, much stupider movies out there in their myriads. Movies without Tony Azito, Hector Elizondo, Hillary Shapiro or, for that matter, Johnny Depp. Variety put it succinctly: "Cast tries hard in a losing cause."

Focussing through the misdirection of the slick surface you can see Depp doing a remarkably competent job, with a totally different range of expression than that required on Jump Street. His fey manicurist number is really not at all bad -- in fact the difference between his first movie and his second is almost disturbing; he looks as relaxed as if he'd been acting all his life!

Platoon is the only other film Depp's been in that is available commercially. He's remembered most for the scene in which he translates the increasingly out-of-control exchanges between soldiers and villagers just before the old woman is murdered. To me his Vietnamese accent sounds good, and that's about all you can say -- Oliver Stone kept everyone very low-profile. Frankly, and quite aside, I found the acting of the villagers some of the most impressive in the

film, and this is so often the case that I've come to wonder where they get them. I mean is there a special agency for Asian genius bit players or what?

These films weren't, of course, enough to get Depp any kind of a reputation; that came with Jump Street, which has been haughtily ignored even as producers took to courting its star.

Last issue I dealt severely with why "respectable" media don't cover "boy" stars, which helps explain the existence of the teenage fan magazine. You can't regularly get information or photos elsewhere, though the desire for both is

sufficient to power production of over a dozen moderately expensive monthly publications on young white actors, and another handful on young black actors. The racial segregation is almost absolute, paralleling the perturbing trend of television itself. The zines nowadays also segregate along music/non-music lines more than they did in my youth -- back when "teen idol" was virtually synonymous with "rock star".

The outlets for these magazines seem to be disappearing. Only this year a big discount store, a chain of convenience stores and Walgreen's stopped carrying them around here. Drugstores and grocery stores now stock only Teen and Seventeen, which are fashion marketing vehicles all but devoid of boys and thus -- go figure -- up-market. They're slicks and perfect bound, while the real genre items are black & white stapled pulp with color pin-ups. Think about it: these pure tv teen idol magazines are almost the only periodicals in America you can read cover to cover and find -- no advertising! Except for the zine's own back issues and the occasional experimental Tampax ad. This too is changing; it would be interesting to know how the whole thing works, why the economics of the product no longer permit them to go without ads, and why the outlets are dwindling.

Though the vast majority of stars as profiled in their pages do not, the fan magazines themselves actually have faintly distinguishable personalities. Some, probably with really low budgets, re-chew the same two year old bubblegum over and over, some, like Teen Machine, get superior photos, or, like Zing!, print what might actually be called articles. Some grovel in abject adulation, others allow an occasional serrated edge ("Is X

the prison guard's bedtime prayer got to "God bless Roy Cohn." Maybe they were just too young. Or too het.

I'd've loved to've trailed a-long listening to all the audience comments afterwards, the ones I did hear were from such unexpected angles. Down the row from me, when campy striped prison pajamas came on the screen, a leather-jacketed kid said to his date, "That isn't what they wear." Depp entered the cell in his blue inmate shirt and jeans: "What Cry-Baby has on, that's what they wear." Too clearly, the voice of experience.

And later, a grandfather: "I think the kids would like this."

The grandmother: "That Johnny Depp certainly is good-looking."

Hm.

Could be this show will have a broader base of appeal than I figured.

starting to believe his own publicity?") However, one thing they all have in common is the way you feel kneeling in front of their low shelf at the newsstand. John Waters

-- auteur of Multiple Maniacs, Desperate Living, et al. -- knows: "I felt like such a pervert. I bought like twenty dollars worth of teen magazines. It's really embarrassing to do that." He at least could fortify himself with the knowledge that his heart was pure. He was only trying to find somebody to play Wade "Cry-Baby" Walker in his next film. Chez moi, no strength of ten. There is no rack I wouldn't prefer to be seen rifling through, including the ones bearing Blue Boy, Jugs, or Outlaw Biker, but a fan's gotta do what a fan's gotta do. You steel yourself.

These magazines have saved the sanity of many a cloistered teenage girl, and I'm one of the grateful Redeemed, but even as a kid you pick up on how beyond the pale they're considered. Buying them exposes your vulnerability, your dreams, your vaunting sexual ambitions. We pass in polite silence over the obvious parallels in male reading matter. The fan magazines also answer the deep longing of junior high school girls to believe that, contrary to the evidence of their senses, there exist young males who are friendly, well-disposed human beings. True, the zines prove this by lying through their teeth, but the need is filled.

What you get when you read them is a mirror-thin image, often an image steered through the most perilous shoals by determined editors. Articles are supposed to look like interviews but are almost always PR releases and bits borrowed from the only other sources on these guys, publications but one rung up the ladder of journalistic prestige: tabloids, Modern Screen, People, US, TV Guide, and the occasional newspaper piece when a star comes to town. You might think it would be tough doing research from such sources, and you would be so right, but when I wrote to the unindexed, despised Star, enclosing a check to pay for copying and postage, and humbly begged them for a xerox of an article they had printed sometime in 1988, I didn't know when, they promptly sent me a neatly dated copy of the article -- and returned my check. Star may get such pitiful requests fairly frequently; Denny Lien, who is a university reference librarian, tracked down for me the only library in the country that collects this tabloid: the Library of Congress.

Not many people would care to trust the way they appear to others to Teen Beat, Dream Guys or Yo!, but the young idols have no choice. The swaggering references to "the Deppster" and "the Kirkster" must make them yearn to throttle a responsible party, but at least their intimate sex lives and weirder personal habits are safe in these editors' hands. Actors needing to be cast in "family" or youth oriented programs have to have an image matching Earth's in Hitch-Hiker's Guide: Harmless.

It takes a strong personality -- usually of someone past their teens -- to stand out from this least-common-denominator innocuousness. Compare two images that broke loose, one by its intricacy, the other through straightforwardness:

Johnny Depp has a complex image monitored by professional publicists. Among normal fan magazine hyperbole he has been singled out as exceptionally pleasant, generous, and upright, at the same time more grown-up stories were circulated about temper and even violence on the set; the latter denied by all and perhaps merely the gossip version of his arrest on a charge of assault at a Vancouver party. More than one producer has claimed he was the nicest actor they ever worked with; but Eric Blakeney, who left the show to do Booker, called Jump Street's third year "a season made in hell", partly because of "classic rivalry" when script attention diverted to Richard Grieco. Despite a fabled penchant for jeans and a t-shirt, some photos show Depp in very trendesque rigs indeed, particularly in the type of magazine where not only the couturier but the salons/products responsible for "grooming" and "styling" are credited in fine print up the side of each photo. (It's as well these zines remind us of the realities, but it unsettles you.) He's said to phone and visit sick children who write to him, once bought a painting by boy-killer John Wayne Gacy -- who would probably return the compliment by collecting Depp pin-ups -- chain-smokes, rides a Harley, appears at AIDS benefits; raised on the border between Broward and Dade counties, he's been spotted wearing an End Apartheid t-shirt yet buys his girlfriends diamonds, South Africa's most boycottable export; started trying drugs in sixth grade, thinks he first had sex around age 13, worked with rock bands since back when he was too young to enter legally the bars he played in. Like a lot of rock musicians he seems fairly superstitious. He's subject to anxiety attacks and has a fear of clowns. When he was hard up in L.A., a new acquaintance suggested he try acting, so that same Friday he walked into an agent's office and on Monday landed a lead in

Nightmare on Elm Street. His refusal to discuss romantic attachments has been adamant, yet lately he's begun to state for publication that he's a foot fetishist. At the age of 24, after one marriage and a long Hollywood engagement or two, he had his mother's name tattooed in a heart on his left arm. He passed on big predictable offers in order to play the title hood, Cry-Baby, in the comparatively small John Waters picture. Visibly part Native American (the old tattoo on the other arm is an Indian chief), spectacular in drag, the baby of four kids, a high school drop-out who reads (male) literature with the typical drop-out foreboding that sitting in uncomfortable desks for another year gave graduates some kind of wisdom he missed. It's an image more than a tad out of kilter with the mainstream male stereotype. An image at once articulate and awkward, experienced and vulnerable; sensitive but nobody's toyboy. In short, an image a young actor would kill to possess.

Richard Grieco chain-smokes, rides a Harley, wears jeans and a t-shirt, is from a family of four kids, and if you are experiencing a sense of *deja vu*, uncross your mind's eyes, it ends here. The core of Grieco's image lies in his quotes: "There are people in Jump Street who are jealous from the attention I get. The actors don't say anything, but I can tell." "I've been told every word I say 'drols with sexuality'." While playing college football through four knee operations: "I used to go into the cafeteria and sit alone. Suddenly there would be 20 girls around me. I started thinking, 'Man, I could do something with this charisma.'" "I see myself hot for the next seven years at least. I've analyzed everyone around, and I just don't see anyone who has what I do." People Weekly promptly dubbed him a narcissist. Well -- analyze everyone around and you don't see anyone who has what he does. They have their uniqueness, he has his, and, as long as he watches his weight like a hawk, "hot" is a reasonably precise term to describe this little property. Narcissist, who knows, what it sounds like to me is a man too constitutionally naive to know which thoughts are expressible in public and which are not. Another side of the quotes: "This is all new to me. I'm from a small town, so I'm really honest, and when you're honest with people, they can take what you say out of context." Of his poor and occasionally actually homeless times, "In New York, when you start to study and you're with people who are really into the art of acting, it's amazing where your head goes. You lose all sense of money, fame, credibility with the public. Everything was just the art of acting." "There's this professional animosity between (Johnny Depp and me) -- it's for attention. Everyone could sense this, but once the cameras stopped rolling, we gave each other a hug and a kiss and it was fine." You get the sense, in things like his decision not to publish his poetry "yet", of some gentle steering voices in the wings, genuinely concerned for his interests as well as his image. At least, you hope they are there, because this is the kind of lamb a middling peckish Hollywood reporter eats for brunch.

One image of a man with nothing to hide behind, the other of someone perhaps looking out through a long vista of screens and shelters. Each is an image, though: no first-hand impression, other than what little decoding of personality can be done through the foliage of a role. If you've known nothing about either of these two before, what I've just done is "write" a magazine article, i.e., create a stage illusion for you, the impression that now you know something about them, spun entirely from third- and fifth-hand gossip and a little spit. Reasonably competent legerdemain is all. Image.

Depp resents his ditzier PR. He's begun offering interviews bound -- like the 60s one-shot zine Real True Beatles -- to trash it into oblivion, furnishing the correctives of biting rude words, peculiar little personal squeamishnesses, shy professions of sexual deviance, startling kitschy-bitchy camp tastes, and drowned-rat photo poses. (Five gets you ten the Drowned Rat Look will be suddenly In next year.) John Waters, who asks the questions I'd want to ask but wouldn't dare, elicited some answers that whisked Depp's name from the covers of fan magazines overnight. A final straw to break the back of Depp's politesse may have been last year's Johnny Depp, a biography by the editor of 16 magazine; he says he read a few pages here and there and was "mortified".* The book is far better researched than most of its genre -- its tone is what

* The perfect word. Depp has a writerly gift for the mot juste and key detail. Of Hollywood contracts: "Once you put your name on a piece of paper, you have no choice. There are people in ties with very big pens and hulking desks who do bad things to you." Of not being the beach-boy type envisioned for Elm

militates against a guy's dignity. But often enough it's "the facts" themselves that don't survive an imagemaking process.

Most of us are so innocent we don't expect anyone to outright lie. To some a direct quote is especially sacred. You might cut to the chase in a long quote, but you don't slew it, you don't fuck with it, and you sure as hell don't invent it. First few times I learned this was not a universal constant in media/PR, I was shocked to my socks. "But," I'd murmur in my accustomed dovelike tones, "you changed what they said ((you zinjanthropoid nit))." And the publicist or distributor or editor or producer would honestly have no idea why that would bother me. To add irony to improbity, their changes were always for the worse. They made people sound like saps. Or, more disturbingly, like criminals.

Maybe in Hollywood it doesn't matter. 98% of a screen actor's image probably comes out of appearance and role, unless they do or say something massively inadvisable in public. Yeah, manipulation of image is an industry. Everyone from multinational corporations to the street-corner Lothario hopes looking good will get them everything they want. But it won't, simply because no one basic image appeals to all observers. Or as David Lee Roth put it astutely, "I can't have any woman I want, I can have any woman who wants me."

Plus, you can't control an image absolutely. In Dhalgren, the members of the Scorpions wear miniaturized projectors that cast colored illusions over them. They can't see their own lights, but to others each gang member suddenly appears as a praying mantis, a dragon, a griffin, a scorpion. This metaphor for image invokes awareness of all the gradations, from the partial and selective perception everyone sees of everyone else, through the relatively modest penumbra of a science fiction writer among fans, to the fullblown tyrannosaurus Rex thrown off by a movie star.

When you see a photo of a star arriving at some gala event with a date, and they're huddled together looking dishevelled and scared as Armenian quake refugees because they've just come through a gauntlet of fans, you have to admit reality, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. "What happens when you find out you want something that doesn't exist?" asked Joanna Russ in The Female Man. The star is a grain of sand around whom we wind our luminous and perfect or baroque pearl, and what we created, in our own image, we want to possess. This is a hero with far more than a thousand faces, one for each devotee, a custom-crafted silver-metal lover.

What exactly do we think we "get" if we should somehow obtain the person of an idolized Crush Object? An episode of Friday the 13th dealt with a young man whose cursed antique gave the ability to change one's own body. He made himself good-looking to attract the rock star he worshipped, but just as they were about to make love he realized, "I don't want you -- I want to be you!" Quite an insight, I thought, for episodic tv. My Special Theory of Romance states that we're drawn to the missing parts of ourselves, not parts we never had but the things we lost -- that were crushed in us -- in the socialization process. Hence the heterosexual majority, and hence, I suppose, the love of girls for the apparent spontaneity, hedonism, and sexual impudence of rock stars. Gestalt theory proposes that the missing elements are still really in us, that we can revive them and be more complete persons through therapy. Friday the 13th took a more direct approach, the man actually merging into the woman and taking her place onstage.

"Don't dream it, be it" is more than most of us have nerve for, and besides, being inside a rock star would be a different experience from projecting onto one. Presumably they are just humans, not the incarnate energy/bliss we perceive. The horror hero never found out one way or the other, as his first appearance on any stage was, suitably gruesomely, his last.

Almost everyone has at some point been the object of a phantom love of this nature, and can testify to the unpleasantness of enduring the person who has no idea who or what you really are and doesn't care, so obsessed are they with their interior vision. Not much more fun is the plain unwelcome pass, or the sincere but unrequited interest. To avoid inundations of this, major stars seal themselves away, sometimes to the point where their options are more limited than those of an ordinary person.

Street: "I was sort of emaciated, with old hairspray and spiky hair, earrings, a little fucking catacomb dweller." Of Baltimore, a "magical belly button, with this great suction that pulls all this really strange lint into it." Of memorial taxidermy: "It's fascinating to me that these people loved their animals so much that they would want to pet their filthy, rotting, lifeless pelts postmortem." Of stumbling into a leather bar his first day in Hollywood: "There were a lot of men there who had very big mustaches."

The goal of the manipulation of image is "success", i.e., the opening up of attractive options. Not being able to appear on the street with your face uncovered or always having to be accompanied by guards is a lifestyle we might associate more readily with America's Most Wanted than with our fondest hopes and dreams. Success has curled back on itself in a peculiarly Einsteinian fashion and begun to exhibit characteristics of the least successful state in human society: purdah. And other people's dreams created that reality.

You tread on dangerous ground when you try to analyze exactly what attracts you in the appearance or behavior of another person -- the Eros and Psyche legend being all too firmly rooted in human response -- for the last thing anyone with a hopeless longing wants to do is to be cured of it, but let us examine a single small aspect of Johnny Depp's allure, namely, the expression around his eyes, in almost any still photograph taken before 1990, of inconsolable misery. Ask not why this should be attractive to a woman (All right, I will tell you. It changes the balance of power.) but this triggering mechanism in what will be known as the Decarnin Lost-Kitten Factor of Erotic Attraction has, in some cases, a simple basis in physiology. I once fell long and far for a dark-eyed man with a like expression, and after about a year discovered it to be due in part to unhappiness and in part to a slight uncorrected myopia. If Johnny Depp needs glasses, he's worn them in several roles and looked absolutely darling, so they would not reduce his purely physical appeal (if there is such a thing) but they might drastically alter the subconscious psychological profile girls have of him as an abandoned cub.

Or not. He's a person who's received thousands of letters a week, each and every one of them telling him how brilliant, how sensitive, how beautiful, how good, how beloved he is. In the course of no more than a column and a half of direct quotes in one publication Depp referred to himself as dumb, clumsy, a nerd, a slob, insecure, a clod (twice) and stupid (twice). This the way he defines himself while he is (quote) "incredibly happy". It's the dybbuk, the combinant voice of the hypnotists who surround us when we're kids, a loa in his mouth, and of course he didn't really mean it the way it sounded....

For some it's irresistibly pathetic even as it makes you want to rattle society's teeth in its head for doing this to any child. But the L-K Factor has no more magic universal appeal than any other aspect of image. Producer Joan Carson said, "When I first saw Johnny, he had a felt hat pulled down and these deep brown eyes peering out, with a coat that went to the floor. He was cute as a bug's ear, but he looked like a waif. And I think that's part of his appeal. He can be waiflike, but his charisma comes through." (Emphasis added.) Clearly she didn't find waifism in and of itself cute and charismatic. Of his "scruffiness" 16 editor Randi Reisfeld theorized, "He's embarrassed by his good looks...and therefore goes to great lengths to cover them up by looking positively unattractive." (Definition of positively unattractive: long, careless hair, floppy hat, t-shirt, jeans, boots, leather jacket, dangly earrings -- in short, basic components of a look that has been driving (some) women wild for decades. Herein lies the reason Hollywood and the record industry are periodically swamped by groundswell popularities they did not foresee: they simply do not share the tastes to which they're attempting to pander.)

In any given image there are plenty of other attraction factors, and some people may not respond to any of them. Neither Jim Kennedy nor Candi Strecker (loccol, thish) see anything to write home about in any of the Jump Street actors. My friend Mark, who agrees with me that David Cassidy was far more beautiful than Sean (a view that scandalized my other friend Denys) can't for the life of him understand a partiality for Johnny Depp. My penpal David, who likes Depp, recoiled at the mention of Scott Baio, and of Richard Grieco said, "Well...he doesn't exactly have what you'd call classical good looks, does he?" Another friend, Loren, would instantly single out Dustin Nguyen as the heartbreaker of the flock. Terry, studying a bulletin board of Depp photos, allowed as how he might be attractive once he got older and got some character into his face. Not even the information that he shared her clown-phobia could interest her. But last fall when she caught a glimpse of Peter DeLuise on the tv screen she said immediately, "Now he's cute." (I know what she means. In "Coach of the Year", for instance, with his hair all long and scribbly, he looked like a moody Italian Renaissance prince. But it took me a while to notice it, it didn't jump right out and grab me.)

This isn't a phenomenon of modern media. Rimbaud's best friend Ernest Delahaye got downright eloquent about the beauty of Rimbaud's eyes. Verlaine's wife and mother-in-law thought Rimbaud "coarse and ugly",

while Verlaine found him lovely as an angel. Those who painted him seemed equally divided; even the best surviving photo from those days has two versions, the dim original and the restoration. On the other hand, Verlaine's Paris cronies stated with one voice that Verlaine himself was ugly, yet his early photos show the strange but rather beautiful young man -- admittedly with hilarious whiskers -- who never encountered any shortage of sweet young things of both sexes to snuggle with. (Toward the end of his life he rotated among three, count them, three, different women, one of whom went insane at his death.)

Probably if we could see Shakespeare's boyfriend at least half of us would think, "This is more lovely than a summer's day?"

One thing the fan magazines do advertise is their own slim volumes of tips on how to be more attractive. Just imagining them I get a flashback to my seventh grade Health book. Okay. Everyone who feels the urge to procreate at the sight of well-kept nails and neatly groomed hair, raise your hands.

I thought so.

So there's a little quiz here at the end of the chapter. Your answers will count toward your final grade.

1. What image are you helpless to resist?
2. Name at least one other Factor of Erotic Attraction besides the Decarnin Lost-Kitten Factor.
3. What things do you long to know about a Crush Object?
4. How much of your favorite image comes from physical appearance and body language, and how much from information about the person's behavior and opinions?
5. How much of your favorite images do you think you simply fill in out of wishful thinking?
6. How does the image-formation process differ if it's about a media star rather than someone you know?
7. Give 3 grooming or behavior tips for those wishing to be zeroed in on by you across a crowded room.

Try and answer at least a couple. I'm not sure I need to answer any, after the indiscretions of the past two issues, but I will, next time.

Meanwhile, intriguing as I find the images that are erotic turn-ons for me, there are other kinds. By far the most arresting statement about any of the Jump Street cast was a single tantalizing line on Peter DeLuise in a fan magazine: "Peter felt the (Jump Street episodes) that dealt with women's issues were downright sexist." What I wouldn't give to hear more about that!

THE MASSACRE OF THE INNOCENTS

The news came down from Quebec (grapevines work in mysterious ways): Fox had cancelled not one...not two... but ALL of its dramas. Fox claimed the shows' ratings were too low or the productions were "too" expensive.

Now that's mean. If Fox can't afford to be a real network they oughtta say so instead of trying to blame it on the programs.

Crab as I might about sagged standards, I'm going to miss these shows terribly -- 21 Jump Street, Booker, Alien Nation...and just last week a good episode on gambling corrected some of the squishiness that had seemed so out of place in the context of The Outsiders.

As the shows battle to retain some form of life, RABBITEARS salutes their creators and all participants for what they tried to do, in a medium more variously tricky and proteanly maddening than any other.

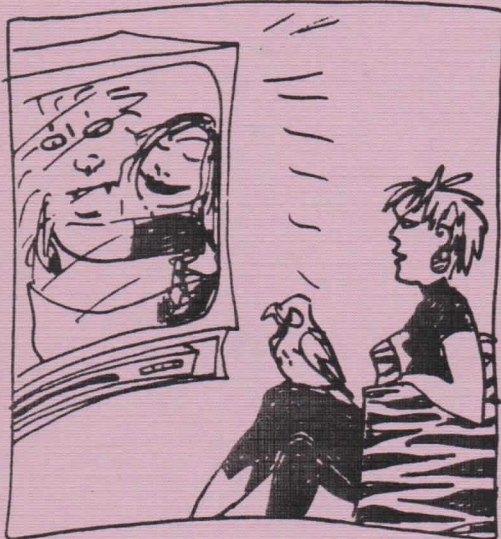
APOLOGIA PRO ZINA SUA

This RABBITEARS came out late -- poverty and other forces of nature got in the way. As usual, most of what's here was written months ago -- for example, the words "last fall" refer to fall 1989. Words cannot describe the slogging and mental anguish required to get this issue through The Reproductive Process, and my heartfelt thanks go out to all who helped, especially Cheryl Cline. The longest articles went through no less than six different computers to arrive at the final printout -- which was done in haste (and great kindness) by someone packing to leave for Japan. This last computer, valiant though its attempt, could not read all the previous computers' codes, hence the odd hard return in the midst of "Bride of Peach Fuzz" lines. Rather than try and run it through yet another computer at yet another temp job or friend's house, I decided to leave it as a monument to the communal generosity and gargantuan effort of will represented by this -- and many another -- zine.

Tv changes fast these days. You can no longer hear the charming version of the My Secret Identity theme song -- it's been upmarketted to a rock tempo that de-emphasizes the lyrics. Surviving in first-run syndication, 21 Jump Street is essentially a different show, with some different stars and almost a total wipeout of the previous production staff. The new writers and directors are, to phrase it kindly, still finding their feet. To check out the series I've extolled, you have to catch the -- painfully mutilated -- syndicated reruns of the third season, most of the second season, or selected fourth-season episodes.

Several new f/sf shows sprang up which aren't reviewed here. Charles in Charge reruns dependably on two different channels, and is still showing new episodes -- several of which appear to be pilots of new shows for the various cast members. Most of the other programs mentioned, except Fox victims like Alien Nation, at least exist.

Next ish: Mama's Family, Parker Lewis Can't Lose, and more. If you'd like to see it, make some response to #2. "Response" is loosely defined in fandom as locs, phocs (phone calls of comment), essays or art (photocopies only, please, no originals), your zine, money (originals only, no photocopies) or gifts (real estate is always tasteful and appropriate). Or, of course, you could make a great tv show.



We watch "Beauty and the Beast": Vincent and Catherine's love affair is frustratingly platonic. They cannot kiss. Vincent has no lips. But, then, Catherine has lips enough for them both.

"Entertainment Tonight" is taking a poll. Which ending do we want to see? There are 3 choices. The parrot and I fight over which number to call. I win, because I'm the one who dials. I choose C. Vincent and Catherine go to Club Med. The parrot wants A. Vincent and Catherine join a nudist colony. No one chooses B. Catherine sells Vincent to the Bronx Zoo.

from Blank Tapes by Stephanie H. Piro

from BlankTapes by Stephanie H. Piro



Egon takes me to dinner. It's the
place where you have to snafe and
clean your own fish. Egon cuts the
head off mine and laughs. There are
fish scales everywhere, even in my
hair. I have long since lost my
appetite, and want to leave. But I am
frozen. I cannot move. The night
passes very slowly...

2020 Portland Ave. S. #3
Minneapolis, MN 55404
USA

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

FIRST CLASS MAIL



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here