

# Arts & Entertainment

## Nerds, aliens, macho men litter new TV season

### Only real men watch NBC

By Chuck Jagoda

I was assigned to monitor the new fall shows on NBC, the network that has been in the news for losing Fred Silverman and acquiring "Taxi" after ABC dropped it.

What could NBC do with its fall lineup that they thought Fred Silverman, the whiz kid of television programming, couldn't? It was worth a look, even for a TV fan who has gotten out of the habit in the last few years.

I was a bit rusty. I must admit I only watched the premiers of two brand new shows, part of one season premier of an old show and a post-premier evening that included one new show and three returning shows. By the end of all that I concluded that anyone who watches seven nights of TV a week is more of a real man than I am.

I saw "The Powers of Matthew Star." Star, the eponymous hero, is a high school hero type. He has a black live-in guardian — will some stereotypes ever change? — played by Lou Gossett Jr. of "Roots" fame. They are royal warriors hiding out at a California high school while enemies from home uncork unwieldy plots against them. Good guys and bad guys both have powers of telepathy and telekinesis. If you think this sounds like a mundane version of "Star Wars", I agree.

The first episode held my attention with some bizarre plot twists that showed promise, but it looked hastily done, as if on an inadequate budget.

"Silver Spoons," is rather reminiscent of ABC's "Benson." There is the same black know-it-all butler, capable woman secretary and conniving assistant. However, in this show the kid isn't a girl. He is a boy, played by Ricky Schroeder. He is central to the plot, in which he unmasks the assistant who is embezzling from Ricky's father.

Father and son have an estranged relationship — the son away at military school, the father resisting the responsibilities of parenthood. At the end of show, the father appears in Ricky's room at school and invites him home. I never felt involved. I never laughed.

The "Saturday Night Live" season premier featured Chevy Chase, live from California, as guest host. He appeared on a TV monitor, which of course fell over. The most innovative addition to the show's format was a review by Roger Ebert and Gene Siskel from "Sneak Previews" of the night's show up to that point. NBC sings praises of its Thursday night's offerings and justifiably so. The season's second showing of "Fame" was the story of a learning-disabled singer (Jimmy Osmond) who is trying to make it as a mainstream student at a high school for the performing arts.

"Cheers" is what "Taxi" might be if its characters hung out in a bar instead of a cab company. Like "Taxi," it is witty, sensitive, cleverly written and humanly acted. "Taxi," which adds generous helpings of word play to the list, this week featured the Rev. Jim as a burnout with a heart. He had a chance at his father's inheritance and he and all his friends gave admirable defenses of the everyday nonconformists among us.

My interest flagged over "Hill Street Blues," which is next in the Thursday lineup. The show seemed interesting and well written, but after two hours of steady viewing I began to feel the effects of TV fatigue. Being a TV critic is rough work, but someone's got to do it.

### Little imagination shown in CBS shows

By Ward Triplett

Chuck Jagoda was assigned to monitor NBC's new fall season. Some people have all the luck. I got CBS.

CBS's new season is the least imaginative and predictable of the three, for the obvious reason that they needed the least help. While NBC has been languishing in last place for what seems like years, CBS has quietly, but steadily, built on its domination of the airwaves with shows like "Dallas," "Dallas" spin-offs, spin-offs of "Dallas" spin-offs and an occasional "All in the Family" revival.

This season, CBS offers two new comedy series (three if you count "Filthy Rich" which premiered this summer), and several adventure series, including "Bring 'Em Back Alive."

Retired TV critic Pat Clark says that "Gloria," one of the new comedies, is off to a stumbling start.

The series, which follows "Archie Bunker's Place" on Sunday, features the once Gloria Stivic, living in California with son Joey. Michael (the meathead) has left to join an agricultural commune, leaving Gloria to raise Joey by herself.

Gloria's first two shows concerned Gloria's desperate search for another man, which you might have expected.

Joey is a sweet, wide-eyed, innocent kid who never gives Mom any trouble, which you also might have expected. The trend toward smart-aleck kids lives only with Gary Coleman now.

"Gloria" is not a great series, but the network did sandwich it between two already successful shows to ensure its survival.

It's a curious move on CBS's part, since the five-show Sunday lineup was one of the strongest on television for two seasons. "Alice" had to be traded to Tuesday night to make way for "Gloria." The move might be fatal to "Alice," whose cast is growing a bit old as it is.

However, "Gloria" should have time to work out its lackluster beginning. One good step might be to tie the spin-off a little tighter to the original "All in the Family." So far, the only thing that indicates that "Gloria" is not just another single-parent sitcom from left field is the dog named Archie.

Being one of the few human beings who did not fall in love with "Raiders of the Lost Ark," I can see very little of interest in the CBS rip-off of that film, "Bring 'Em Back Alive."

You can't blame the networks for coming up with the idea to imitate the blockbuster film but "Raiders" biggest hook was relentless adventure, never-ending excitement, the thrill-a-minute, the unexpected, and you can't repeat that on television.

For one, there are commercials interrupting the action. The series, of course, leaves you hanging through each one of these with a fade-out on a threatening snake or dagger and a crescendo of music. But when things come back, we know that Frank Buck

is not going to get bit, we know that he's not going to get stabbed. At the movies, your guess is as good as mine.

There's also the problem of creating enough adventures for Frank to dance his way through. After all, how many lost arcs can there be with enough importance to attract Nazis and Third World do-no-gooders to provide Frank with target practice?

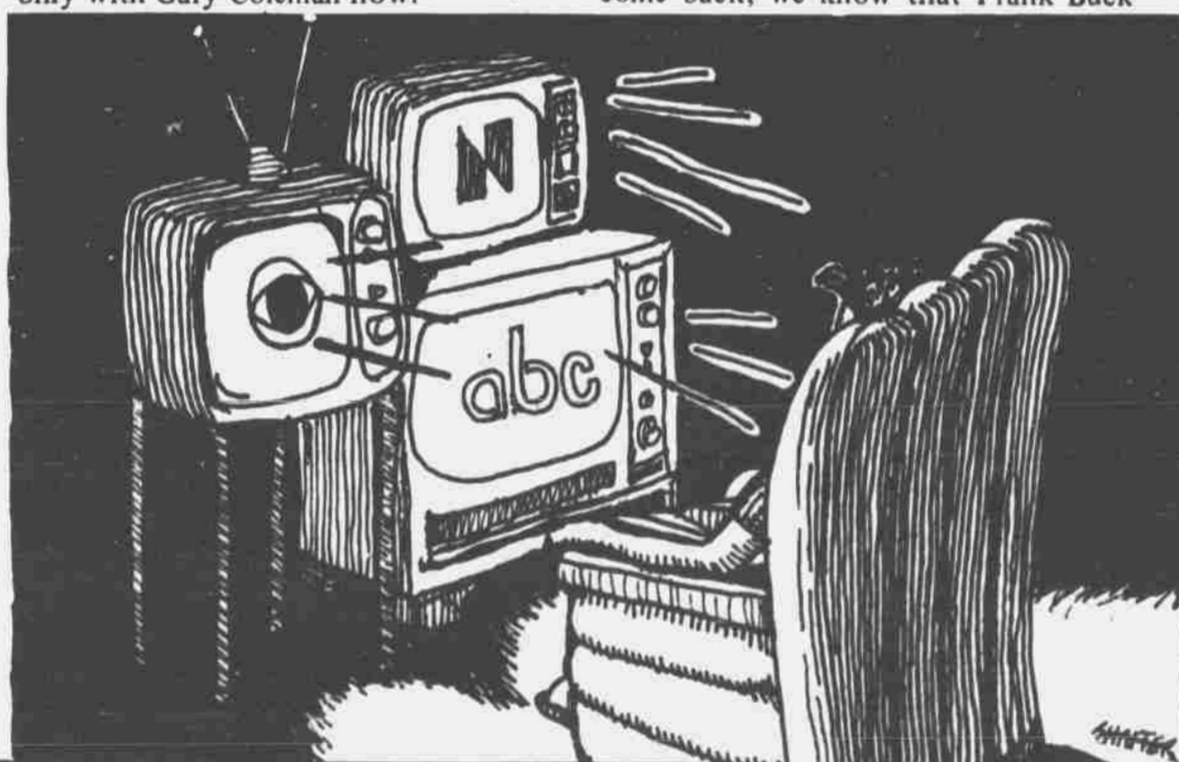
There is something to be said for the one-man adventure series, but this format is doomed from the start.

The one series that people around me seem to have fallen for this season is "Square Pegs", a "Ridgemont High" inspired sitcom. I didn't think the premiere of "Square Pegs" was that impressive. The two main characters, both very nice girls with pure thoughts and good meaning, enter high school with one purpose, to become popular.

Of course, nice people with good intentions are never popular in high school anywhere. Both the characters who serve as their antagonists are stereotypes. Predictably, there is the class president who is in and on everything, the senior class stud with nothing but himself on his mind (who is also in everything), the dizzy, stereotyped token black who at least is female for a change. (In every high school comedy, except the "White Shadow," there has always been that one black person who is always the best singer, best dancer, "talks, black," etc. Being black, I know this person does not exist, the networks are still convinced that he does.

The main antagonist is, as always, a snotty, rich type who, to be contemporary, speaks "Valspeak." The series is saved by the personality and depth of the two main characters, and the two class rejects who are attracted to them. That is another network ploy, group the main characters with the weirdos. But it works on "Square Pegs."

Once the series begins to grow away from the popular schtick and starts to explore real problems and conflicts, as its first two shows have indicated it might, this will be an excellent program. Too bad it can only last three years maximum, unless we can follow the girls through college, too. (I still want to know what the "White Shadow" cast is doing nowadays...)



### New ABC shows rip-offs of good movies

By Jeff Goodwin

OK, I'll be honest. I volunteered for this assignment. I figured what could be easier than watching a few new shows on ABC and telling the public what I thought of them.

But, alas, things didn't turn out that way. I watched some college football games on ESPN, went to the movies a couple of times, read and one time I think I even studied. Well, maybe not.

I did see two shows, not counting the new Pac-Man cartoon I saw one Saturday morning at 7:30. It was actually a pretty good show, as cartoons go these days, but I think the early hour will keep me from being a regular viewer.

"Tales of the Gold Monkey" is shown Wednesday nights. It is a not-so-subtle rip-off of "Raiders of the Lost Ark." Instead of Indiana Jones, we have Jake Cutter. Jake is a pilot in the South Pacific in the late 1930s. He spends most of his time running around fighting Nazi spies. When he's not fighting Nazi spies, he's fighting Japanese spies. Obviously, he and Winston Churchill were the only ones to appreciate the menace of the Axis powers.

Jake gets a lot of help from a beautiful American spy who poses as a singer. He also has a mechanic who's a rummy and in constant need of a drink. But after all, fighting the Axis powers is bound to make one thirsty.

The real star of this show, though, is Jack. Jack is Jake's dog. He only has one eye, that is one real eye. He also has a glass eye, which Jake loses in a poker game in the opening shows. (The eye has a sapphire in it, hence its value.) Naturally, Jack is mad about this, and he stays mad the whole show. At the end, we find that Jack's eye is headed for the Philippines.

As for the show itself, well, John Hillerman was good as a Gestapo agent, but he got knocked off. The second show had to do with some Mud People. Yeah, real Mud People. They went around with mud on their heads. We're talking primitive here, folks. The rest of the plot was, pardon the expression, muddled.

This series does have one thing in its favor. At least ABC is stealing their ideas from good movies. If they start stealing from movies like "Quintet," they're scraping the bottom of the barrel.

I also saw "Matt Houston," which runs Sunday nights. Matt is, as you might have guessed from his name,

a Texan through-and-through. But he's moved his business empire west to Hollywood, and that's a lot more convenient for his hobby, which is playing detective.

Matt has a beautiful house, several beautiful cars, a beautiful lawyer and a beautiful mechanic to take care of his beautiful cars. Let's face it, Matt Houston is a beautiful person. Fortunately, not everyone is. This gives Matt a chance to solve some nasty crimes, mainly murder.

In the opener, his client was the daughter of a murdered Greek businessman. This guy was really nasty. Nobody was even upset that he was bumped off.

Naturally, Matt's client was the obvious suspect. And naturally she didn't do it. (One thing I've learned from years of watching detective shows: The obviously guilty party is always innocent. Of course, it takes Matt two hours to prove that his client is innocent. From now on he only gets an hour.)

This show is saved by its sense of humor. Matt doesn't take himself too seriously. He knows he could be back riding the range anytime. And, given the quick axe TV executives often display, there's a good chance that will happen. Saddle up, Matt.