

Arts & Entertainment

Couch potatoes turn on, space off all night long

By David Wood

In today's laid-back circles, the in slang for TV junkie is *couch potato*, if you didn't know.

Get in touch.

That's what it's all about — television, the mass pabulum our generation cuts its teeth on. It's our folklore, the stuff pedestrian dreams are made of. Turn on



and space off to shared "misreality." That's what it's about — tuning in or out, depending on how you look at it, getting in touch with getting out of touch.

This review of "The Attack of the 50-Foot Woman" (last Friday at 11:30 on KSHB) is addressed to the budding potatoes in the audience.

You know who you are. Odds are you mainline your pabulum. You tap straight into the national psyche with cable, possibly the greatest invention since the toaster.

It's easy to be innocently hooked. Take it from a hard-core, card-carrying, die-hard couch potato — it's simpler than falling asleep.

You hardly know it, but soon, every weekday night, you're watching "The Twilight Zone" on channel two or "The 'Zone'" as it's known in the vernacular. And once you're into "The 'Zone,'" you can, as they say on "The Love Boat," "wave goodbye to sanity." For the serious couch potato, the night's just starting.

"Danger: 'All Night Live' may be addicting" — there's that warning every night, but true potatoing is never having to say you care. If you've any promise at all, you'll promptly learn the backhand salute and creed of Ed Muscare and his limp cat Caffeina, the hosts of "All Night Live" — or "Uncle Ed," as it's called in the vernacular.

(Ed, I hope I'm spelling your cat's name right. And if you're reading this, Ed, I've got an idea I want to bounce off you — "All Weekend Live.")

Keeping in the vernacular, "The Stooges" is next, then comes the movie. This is what separates the genuine 'taters from the heap — to stare down a feature flick after an episode with Rod Serling and a numbing half-hour of the Three Stooges.

Ed's always got a theme for his weekly lineup of movies, and his discriminating eye for mindless cinema is part of what

makes Ed the object of insomniacal praise. Last week, in keeping with Thanksgiving spirit, the theme was turkeys.

A turkey, of course, is a bird we annually eat to commemorate the first Englishmen to bring their wives and kids to America, and Ed had two spokesbirds for the species on Monday. It was the liveliest I've ever seen Caffeina, clawing Ed's neck.

But in "potatoese," *turkey* means something else — it's a movie so consummately bad that it's classic.

To summon the inertia to sit through a whole turkey is a feat for even the most lumpish potato. I admit I endured "The Attack of the 50-Foot Woman" only after dulling myself with two days of holiday gluttony.

A white orb lands on the horizon. Two cops hop from a station wagon with shotguns. Inside the orb are diamond necklaces suspended in fish bowls, and the cops *ooh* and *ah* until things start rumbling and smoking. There's a shot of hills poorly

superimposed with a shot of a bald guy in studded overalls making mean faces. We see the cops shoot. We see the guy growl. A cop heaves a rock that apparently explodes on impact. The bald guy, looking demented, picks up a model car. Then we see an upside-down station wagon, then fleeing cops, then a pulled-over convertible and a woman with diamond necklace screaming. An inflated hand with tufted knuckles bounces into the scene. The title swoops across the screen:

That's the last real action we see until the final 15 minutes. That's too bad, as it's the awful special effects, not the awful acting and lack of continuity, that makes "The Attack of the 50-Foot Woman" the turkey it is.

The terrorized woman, one Nancy Archer, somehow escaped the hand and returns to the town square to hysterically tell a small crowd her story. Everyone thinks she's a raving kook anyway and proceeds to mention she's got the biggest diamond in these parts. The townfolk take the cops more seriously.

"OK, folks. There's a flying satellite and a 30-foot giant up the road."

"A 30-foot giant — oh boy."

Next we meet Nancy's husband, Harry Archer. He's in the saloon philandering a floozy, one Honey Parker. When he's told Nancy's having a fit, he tosses back a whiskey and says, "You know everyone's seeing flying satellites these days," and Honey and he dance.

There's no mention of UFOs and aliens — it's always a flying satellite and a 30-foot giant. It's a good touch for a bad movie.

Anyway, the next hour or more are stunningly dull, but finally, Nancy starts to grow. She's in a hospital. Two bearded doctors with lame Viennese accents are discussing her case.

"It's these supersonic times we live in," one says.

"I don't know how long the morphine will last considering her body weight," the other comments.

Suddenly, a huge inflated hand with polished nails bursts through the door. There's the noise of things breaking and nurses screaming.

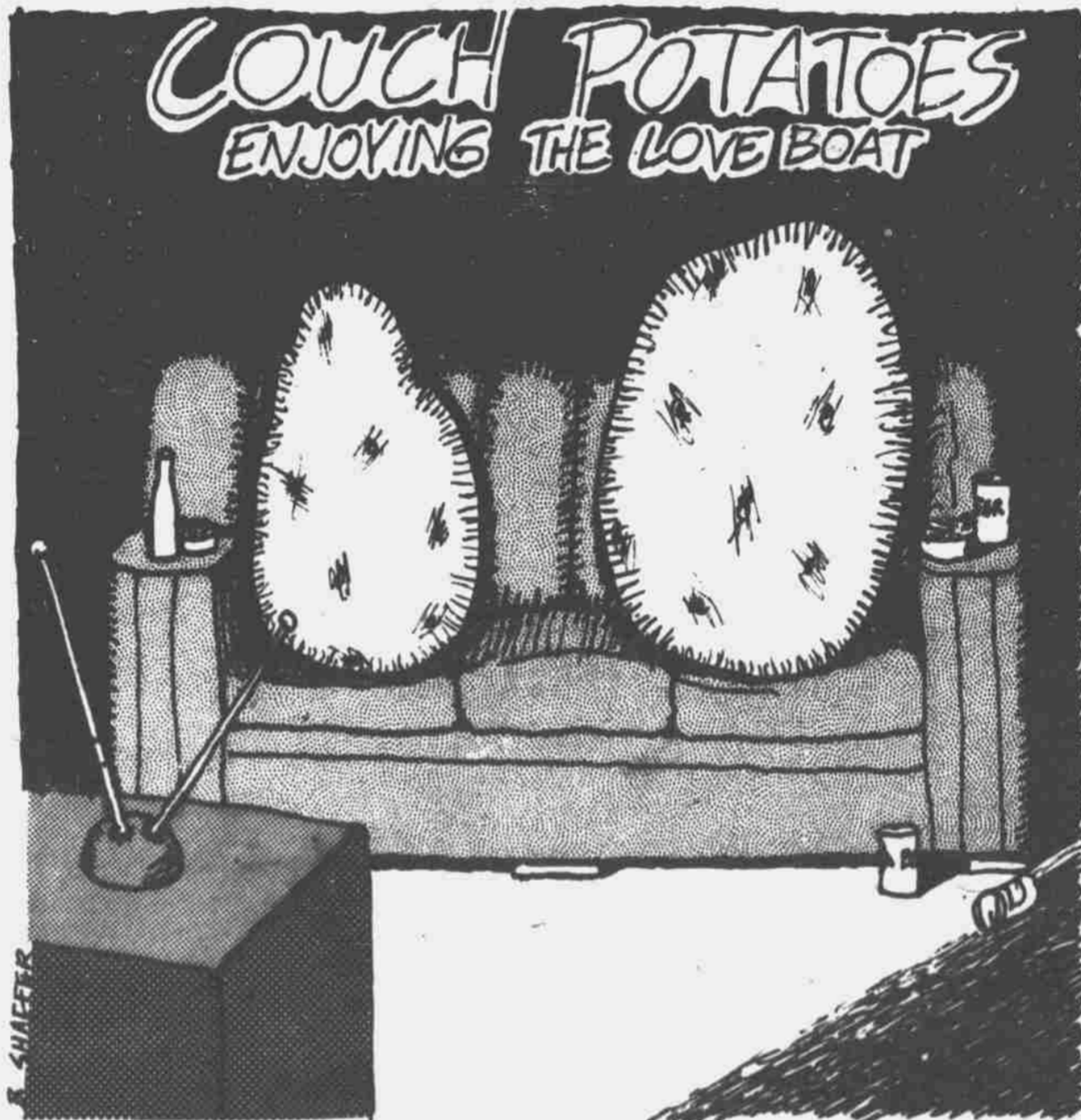
"More morphine! More morphine!" the doctors yell.

A woman sits up through a cardboard and balsa-wood roof. It's apparently Nancy, but now she's blond, instead of brunet, and wearing shorts and a bikini top, instead of a low-cut gown. Details don't matter — in fact, the opening scene with the cops and the exploding rock is repeated *verbatim* later in the flick. But potatoes don't care. Stupor is its own reward.

We see some more of the pathetic double-exposure technique — a semi-transparent woman superimposed against a semi-transparent background. Harry's still in the saloon romancing. When he's told his wife's a giant and after him, he flips the messenger a bribe and says "Tell her you couldn't find me." Honey and he wassail drunkenly off for another dance.

A blimp hand cruises in from the window. (In scenes as these, you only ever see a hand, but this erstwhile potato could envision Nancy as a dirigible in Macy's parade, Ed Muscare commenting.) Nancy shakes a limp doll then is shot, and the flick ends with the obligatory moral — "Well, she finally got Harry back." It's a grim lesson about infidelity that only a serious couch potato would understand.

A backhand salute to you, Ed.



'Creepshow': Stephen King should know better

By Jeff Goodwin

Stephen King has made a fortune by writing scary novels — and rightfully so. He is the acknowledged king of horror, a genre that doesn't lack for pretenders to the throne.

King's latest venture is a film. He wrote the screenplay



for "Creepshow" and makes his acting debut in one of its episodes.

"Creepshow" lacks the outright scare-your-pants-off suspense of King's novels, but it does get you out of your seat a time or two. When you know something is going to happen and you're still scared, you have the makings of some pretty good suspense.

George Romero (of the 1968 cult classic "Night of the Living Dead") directed "Creepshow." The combination of King and Romero works well. They're not Moses Malone and Dr. J, but they do OK.

The film is made up of five different episodes, each having its own particular ghoulish qualities.

The worst episode is the one in which King stars. He plays a hick idiot who discovers a meteor in his backyard. Like an idiot, he gets some alien stuff on his hands and turns into the world's largest plant. Anybody who's ever seen "The Twilight Zone" ought to know better than to play with meteors. And King ought to know better than to write something this bad.

The rest of the episodes are fair to good. My personal favorite was the one in which Hal Holbrook and Fritz Weaver portray college professors who discover a box from an Arctic expedition containing a nasty little creature. Enough said, but be prepared for blood.

This brings us to special effects. Hollywood keeps getting better and better in this area. How much further in grossness and bad taste can filmmakers go? But, compared to some of the films going around these days, "Creepshow" isn't that bad.

This film doesn't go out of its way to gross you out, with the possible exception of the last episode.

E.G. Marshall plays a rich, Howard Hughes-like millionaire who has a clean apartment and a phobia about germs. Not surprisingly, he soon finds himself with a roach problem — a very bad roach problem at that. Roaches are pretty bad in themselves but when you get tons of them together... bring lots of Raid.

Most of King's books are virtually impossible to put down. "Creepshow" doesn't have that kind of tension to

it, in spite of the fact that film is probably a better medium for suspense than literature.

The trouble with "Creepshow" is that most of the suspense is telegraphed. Even a person with glasses can see through it.

One reason for this is that several scenes are just blatantly stolen from other movies. And if you've seen very many horror shows at all, you'll be able to figure out what's coming next.

All of the actors and actresses perform reasonably well, even King. His episode is the weakest because of his script, not his acting.

Perhaps the best acting job is turned in by Adrienne Barbeau who plays Hal Holbrook's wife. She turns in the consummate portrayal of the nagging wife. In years to come, people will look on her performance as the ultimate in bitches.

This episode also provides most of the show's humor, most notably when Holbrook fantasized about killing his wife. The method he comes up with shows little originality.

If you're a Stephen King fan or just a horror fan in general, you'll like "Creepshow." But be advised that some scenes are not for the squeamish.

"Creepshow" is currently showing at the East Park Three Theater.