

It's eight in the morning and Mom has thrown out your paper due in English class today. So what do you do? You root through the garbage looking for the goods while dispensing with rest. That's what television is all about.

For all those who haven't heard of television, it has to do with the box in your house that has a glass front and projects light. It's also the place with the whole family spends more of their time than anywhere else.

For all those who have heard of television, it's the device by which you allow yourself to be drawn into without the benefit of interaction. Television is a very one sided media presentation.

So the demand for quality television should be great, but alas it's non-existence. Most people are happy to accept whatever spews out of there television without the slightest hint of disapproval. These are the type of people who need television to exist.

It's this lack of quality which makes television a garbage bag filled with alot of trash and just a hint of useful items.

In an attempt to clarify what's good and what's not on television, a sifting through this garbage bag is necessary. The hands and arms are just going to have to get messy.

Major categories

Television can be broken into several major categories. First, there's the prime-time period of the day. This is so called period which starts about eight in the evening and ends about eleven. The use of about is to indicate that prime-time should be applied to the heaviest period of television viewing. This begins with the early evening news and ends with the various talk shows after eleven-thirty.

Beyond that, there is the early-morning period, with all it's good mornings and hellos that a stomach can stand before you realize your late for work or school. That period is followed by the rest of morning and afternoon periods. It's an amazing bag of tricks geared towards mothers and children.

Finally, the weekend period, which for the most part, is a totally different affair from the rest of the week.

Together, these periods complete the rather interesting package known as television programming. Now on to specifics.

Prime-time

Since prime-time is the biggest common period of television viewing for most people, it's the mostly likely place to start.

Prime-time can be broken down into basic groups. There are drama, comedy, comedy for kids, soap opera, action, cops and robbers, magazine and miscellaneous shows to choose from.

Drama

Recently, drama shows tend to make up less and less of the percentage of total television time. The best of the drama shows are NBC's *St. Elsewhere* and *Hill Street Blues*.

St. Elsewhere and *Hill Street Blues* tend to cut away the fronts of the world and get at some of the real thing. The shows create real situations involving real people — actual quality, talent and entertainment. Beyond that, the rest of the drama show isn't worth the time or effort. Case closed.

Comedy

Comedy offers a sort of mixed bag of shows, each with various levels of accomplishments. On the one hand you have the prue trash of ABC's *Three's a Crowd*, *Who's the Boss* and *Love Boat*, which makes up the worse two hours on television. And on the other hand, shows like NBC's *Family Ties*, *The Cosby Show* and *Night Court* let you know that, yes there is good comedy out there.

Family Ties is probably the best comedy show on television inspite of all the hype *The Cosby Show* has received.

The actors who portray Alex, Mallory and Jennifer Keaton (Michael J. Fox, Justine Bateman and Tina Yothers respectively) on *Family Ties* have to be a set of the funniest trio ever unleashed on television.

But Bill Cosby of *The Cosby Show* and Harry Anderson of *Night Court* are still two of the best comedians in the business and they prove it each week. Everything else falls in between of these two extremes.

Of all these in between shows, three require more noticing. They are NBC's

Double Trouble CBS's *Newhart* and HBO's *Not Necessarily The News*.

The Sagal twins, Jean and Liz of *Double Trouble* are capable of so much but deliver just a mere sliver of their potential.

Bob Newhart is a seasoned veteran of television comedy and understands how the medium works. The big flaw of his current show is that Newhart is just going through the motions on occasion and the show wanes because of it.

Not Necessarily The News is a belly full of laughs but one can only take so much parody before it regurgitates back at you. It best in small doses.

films in the last ten years. He makes *Mike Hammer* a show worth watching as much as one can. Of course, that's after he serves his prison sentence for cocaine possession in England.

Miami Vice combines great images, cute guys, a semi-real plot and decent background music into a better than average cops and robbers show. But, the show has a big flaw in terms of the treatment of the characters. For example, Don Johnson of *Miami Vice* wears thousand dollar suits and drives around in a expensive car all on a policeman's salary. How can anyone take that the show seriously?

there are the afternoon soap operas which are no different from the prime-time soap operas, just longer and not as flashy. Some of these shows have been on for twenty years. For all those who must watch soap operas, here's a little guide for your viewing: Don't watch NBC's *Santa Barbara*. The show hurts more than a knife wound. Most of the time it's even worse.

Opposite the soap operas are the children cartoons and the re-runs of the re-runs. These include *Inspector Gadget*, *Fat Albert*, *He-man* and *the Masters of the Universe*, *Gomer Pyle*, *USMC*, *F-Troop*, *Gilligan's Island*, *Hogan's Heroes*, *Bewitched* and *My Favorite Martian*. Of the cartoon portion of this list (guess which ones?) most couldn't cut it or are re-runs from Saturday morning television. Best of the cartoons is *Inspector Gadget*. Beyond that, nothing.

For the re-runs, most are comedies, all are bad shows which you can't take another second of without going for mental help. Avoid like death, where possible.

Another avoid-at-all-cost list includes the games shows which inhabit the airwaves. They seek out and destroy the minds of the Americans.

They are in no particular order: *\$25,000 Pyramid*, *Joker's Wild*, *Wheel of Fortune*, *Price is Right*, *Jeopardy!*, *Body Language*, *Scrabble*, *Let's Make A Deal*, *\$100,000 Name That Tune*, *Press Your Luck*, *Tic Tac Dough*, *Family Feud*, *Anything for Money*, *Sale of Century*, *Dream House*, *Card Sharks* and *Time Machine*. Every show above is worse then any soap opera. REPEAT: every show above is worse then any soap opera. Now that's bad.

There are only two game shows on television worth watching. *College Bowl* and *Scholastic Scrimmage* are two public boardcast television offerings involving students. They are intelligent, thought provoking and worth the time to look at mainly because the players are intelligent and act like real people.

Early-morning T.V.

Early-morning television is still one of the most amazing period of television programming. It starts off with the three news/talk/entertainment programs, ABC's *Good Morning America*, NBC's *Today* and CBS's *CBS Morning News*.

Bryan Gumbel of *Today* is the most in control of his show and along with Jane Pauley make one of the best teams at what they do. David Hartman of *Good Morning* is usually too concerned with his smile then the show, so viewers always seem uneasy watching him. As for CBS's entry, lets hope it fades before anyone notices it.

Weekend T.V.

Now on to the weekend, collective the worse two days of television viewing there is. Since I have addressed most of makes up weekend programming, only the gaps of Saturday Morning and Sports need filling.

Saturday morning is the period when the kids are up hours before their parents so television is expected to design its programming accordingly. Unfortunately, the networks forgot to ask the kids what they want, so all you get is a mixture of shows whose marketing approach always includes a line of toys.

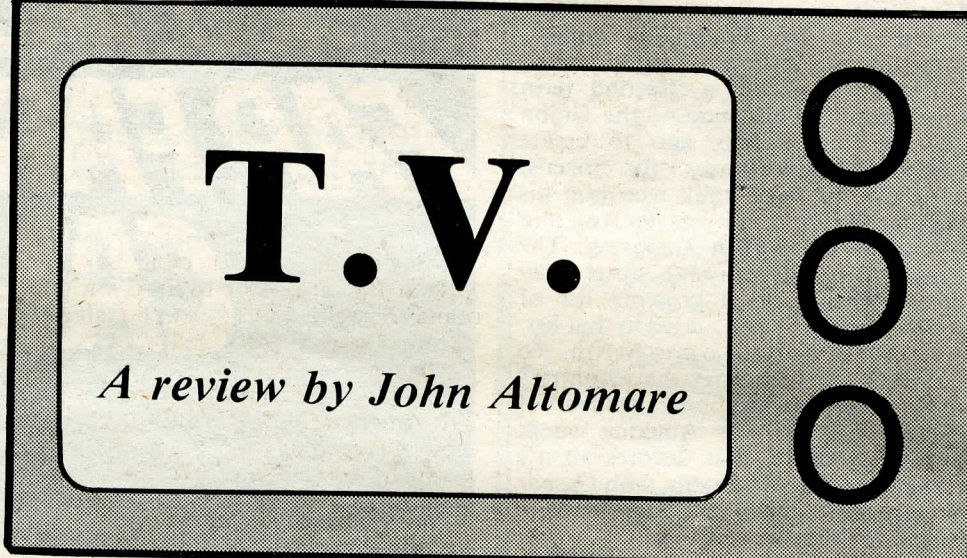
Through the vast wasteland of Saturday morning television comes three shows, *Dungeons and Dragons*, *Bugs Bunny/Road Runner Show* and *Pryor's Place*. After that, there's nothing.

Dungeons and Dragons is a cute, fluffy cartoon which consistently tries to present a moral. The animation is good and the storylines are surprising intelligent.

Bugs/Road has good animation and fine action plots — beyond that, nothing. But it's better then the rest.

And finally, the best thing on Saturday Mornings is *Pryor's Place*. It's warm, intelligent, witty and not a cartoon at all. The show is hosted by Richard Pryor, one of the top comedians around, who has taken his past events as a kid and transformed them into morals. It's the same thing that made CBS's *Fat Albert* and *the Cosby Kids* so good, but *Pryor's Place* is better.

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Prime-time soaps

And now, with not too much fanfare, the prime-time soap operas, easily the worst shows on television. I thought that there was nothing below worthless but then, behold, soap operas entered the world of television and I was mistaken.

The worst of the worst is by far NBC's *Berenger's*. Does the network actually believe this show deserves to exist? It rates a big, fat negative ten on a scale of a hundred. Next comes ABC's *Dynasty*, which isn't much better. A real zero. After that comes everything else, all rating somewhere between zero and five on a scale of a hundred. These shows include CBS's *Dallas*, *Falcon Crest*, *Knots Landing* and ABC's *Hotel*.

But what is worse than these shows are the people who watch them religiously. Most people who watch the rest of television are just viewers, but the people who watch soap operas are fanatics.

Action shows

Moving up on the intelligence level from soap operas are the action shows. The biggest problem with television action shows are that they pretend to be real shows and not just a lot of car, plane and boat chases, gun shoot-outs with cute guys and pretty girls. NBC's *Code Name: Foxfire*, CBS's *Magnum P.I.* and ABC's *Matt Houston* top the list as the biggest pretenders. Garbage bag, please.

But some shows know exactly what an action program should contain as well as what it shouldn't. Clearly, the best by far is NBC's *A-Team*. It has a clear sense of what it really is and delivers each week. The *A-Team* is like a real live cartoon, which is what a action show should be.

Of course, this doesn't make the *A-Team* good, just a good action show. You can still get all the action and the plot from watching the part before the opening credits and the entire closing credits. The characters are still paper thin and not a single death is ever seen. Plus, an action show recycles its plot and action more than just continuously.

Cops and robbers

A step up from the action shows are the cops and robbers show. Cop and robbers refer to any action show which make use of a basic plot plus a lot of action. Further, some make use of complex plots, real characters, great visuals and fancy hardware with various results.

CBS's *Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer*, *Cagney and Lacey*, NBC's *Miami Vice* and *Remington Steele* are the best among the field. While ABC's *T.J. Hooker* is so low that it is like the liquid that drips off the bottom of the trash bag. Doesn't William Shatner of *T.J. Hooker* have any respect?

Now getting back to the good stuff, Stacey Keach of *Mike Hammer* is one of the real talents to appear on television or

Remington Steele, on the other hand is quite believable when Pierce Brosnan wears expensive suits and gets chauffeured around in a limousine. The character he plays in the show demands it. The show also makes creative use of images, but they are sometimes over done. The biggest problem with *Remington Steele* is the lack of new plots. It's a good show and yet it's can't seem to grow with any certainty. Maybe next season it could be better.

Of the good cops and robbers shows, *Cagney and Lacey* has the most potential. It has good plots, sometimes great. Characters you can root for and believe in as well as enough action. Yes, the show has potential, it's a shame the show never explores it. Sometimes, it lacks a certain finale which is important to this type of show.

Of the rest of the cops and robbers show, the base of each is the same as the four shows above. Some use fancy hardware like NBC's *Knight Rider* and CBS's *Airwolf* or wish of fancy hardware like NBC's *Riptide*. But in the end, they all fall short of the four shows above in some way or another.

Miscellaneous

Filling the gaps left by the rest are magazine shows and the miscellaneous shows.

In the magazine department is CBS's *60 Minutes*, the most informative, ABC's *20/20*, the imitator. *20/20*'s more entertaining than informative, and NBC's anything which is usually better but fails horribly. Add to the list, ABC's *Nightline*, which has more depth on one current subject then any of the other shows and your picture is complete.

The miscellaneous shows are NBC's *Tonight Show* with Johnny Carson, *Late Night* with David Letterman and *Saturday Night Live* (SNL). All these shows are live in one form or another and that is a plus.

But they are also becoming quite worn, especially the *Tonight Show* and *SNL*. *Letterman* is at least funny for a few moments but that all you get. It's a comic version of the *Tonight Show*. *SNL* is not funny or good. Carson has lost a lot since the beginning or even last week for that matter. It might be time for Carson to hang it up.

Well that takes care of prime-time with the exception of made-for-television movies and mini-series, but there really hasn't been a decent one since NBC's *Centennial* and that's a while. Today's mini-series include such standards as ABC's *Hollywood Wives* and *Lace*. These shows are so full of trash that most people think they're good. That figures with Americans.

Afternoon T.V.

Moving on to the rest of television, we explore afternoon television. I have to explore because there is nothing here. First