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MONITOR
MONITOR

NUMBER TWO IN AN OCCASSIONAL
SERIES. THIS WEEK

SCHADENFRAUDE RAUDE

UNCLE STEVIE TAKES A GANDER AT
THE EARTHQUAKE AND ROLLER
GAMES. TWO MORE EXAMPLES OF
HUMAN SUFFERING THAT HAVE
MASSIVE ENTERTAINMENT VALUE.

The Germans call it Schadenfraude: a gratuitously morbid interest in the suffering of fellow human beings. If there has been one event in the past decade that has exemplified just how much networks feel that their ratings are affected by this principle, then it was surely the big shake that hit downtown San Francisco last Tuesday. Within moments, every network pulled out the stops to go digging in the carnage and every third-string political dick head and disaffected geekoid geologist was at hand to utter some of the most inane rhetoric you could possibly hope for. Doubtless every sympathy was in accordance for the family and friends of the lost; but did we really have to sit through three straight hours of regional news anchors combing through "the massive tangle of concrete and steel that once was the Ninety free way?" No. Especially not every seven minutes. In an ideal T.V. world one would be apprised of the disaster, informed of telephone hotlines for concerned relatives and have done with it. What we don't want is a sham-concerned Tom Brokaw using his entire repertoire of epithets and euphemisms to fill in between pointless commentary of spineless polyps representing the hopeless constituents that were sadly not directly beneath any of the falling masonry.

Pretty soon the powers-that-be were thrown into the public forum to share a tear with the victims. Quayle was actually at hand rather too quickly, almost suggesting that somebody in the White House knew rather too much about the inevitability of severe aftershocks. Not long afterwards it was Poppy's turn. "There is no ceiling at the compassion of the American people..."

Sniffled Bush referring to out of towners offering their residences to homeless strangers "... how do you put a price-tag on it? ... it is the American

way and will continue to be the American way."

Little did Bush know however, that, even as he spoke, thousands of tourists were flooding into the area and armed to the teeth with zoom-lenses and video cameras. Put a price-tag on that George.

Now that we knew all the amateur video-tapes off by heart - the car disappearing into a crack on the 880 Bay bridge; the waitress falling down behind the bar; the kid on the duck with wheels the real test of endurance began. Witness after witness had a lens poked in their face and were asked to describe how they felt about losing a loved one or about the fact that "somewhere under all those tons of rubble your son might still be alive?"

Again the Questions arises -- how do these sensation-hungry bastards sleep at night? Easy. Because they know that millions of ghouls lap this televisual pus up like foetid honey and advertisers recognize this with frightening clarity.

Finally another aspect of American society was neatly encapsulated by an event on Sunday. Long-shoreman Buck Helms was found alive in the collapsed bridge and -- presto! -- A symbol was born. Whether it is three trapped grey whales or the 'jogger' victim of Central Park wilding, Americans turn to these stories with a rabid self-aggrandizing interest despite the fact that ordinarily they wouldn't give a fuck about things that, in these instances, concern the extirpation of indigenous wildlife or urban atrocities. Within hours of the discovery, hundreds of well-wishers gathered at the hospital to pay their respects and Mr. Helms was otherwise the talk of the town. Helms was recognized as an all pervasive manifestation of survival and perseverance. A blind and trite metaphor granted given the far greater suffering surrounding them, but a symbol nevertheless. Over the next forty eight hours

we were to become intimately associated with the general health of our new mascot.

Indeed it was the earthquake that prevented me from catching the first ten minutes of the atrocious Roller Games (NBC Saturday 2 am) in premise, the concept for this potentially rather exciting arena sport is quite good. Take a handful of good-looking athletes (men and women) suit 'em up in Spandex and items from the Road Warrior wardrobe and sen 'em hurling around attract to score a few points and more importantly, bash seven shades of shit out of each other. During the earlier games of the excellent Roller Ball (1975) we saw how effective this could be. In reality it was a more violent than Ice Hockey of NFL and required a considerable amount of skill and stamina. But what we get on Roller Games is the most banal and crass choreography that even transcends the standards of professional wrestling. Basically one member of each team can score. These are 'the Jetters' and they have one chance of getting above designated lines on 'the wall of death' and then leaping over 'the Jetway' to accumulate a maximum of eight points. On the second trip they have to run the gauntlet of blockers. This is where the fun starts. Receiving barely a nudge from an opposing player, the recipient of an are to the side of the body will go screaming over the rails clutching their stomachs; instead of trying to get around a 'blocker' a 'jetter' will go full tilt into his/her agent of misfortune with barely an arm lifted in defense. People actually pay to see this? If anybody is actually getting hurt though, it is the women. True they do have what looks like cocozoic straja of pasta stuffed down the back of their shorts but you can't simulate pulling hair or a stiff elbow to the boob. In essence, these

women are the stuff of a school boys best want-nightmare-fantasy: screeching squealing Playboy centrefold bitches on wheels! Imagine! (opps gimme a Kleenex!) Also borrowed from wrestling in recognition of the fact that this shit has to be made interesting somehow are the continuing proto-soap opera Shanigans concerning some of the players. This week Jennifer Van Gilder (one of the T-bird twins) had been more or less kidnapped by the evil skull (a right dickhead that looks as frightening as a passion fruit) to play on the Violators team, would her ex-boss save her? Would 'Dar the Star' help her in a clinch with sweet Stephanie (who, incidentally, is eerily reminiscent of Carla from Cheers)? Basically, who gives a shit? The icing on the skunk-vom for me comes with the

mock sports round-up with Wally George. Wally, a repulsive white-haired Mort Downey sound a like, has a beef about alligators and is disgusted that another roller team, 'the Maniacs', regularly fills the conveniently filled pool at the centre of the track with these animals.

"Return these slimy green lizards to th swamps where they belong!" bellows Wally causing several hundred thousand viewers to yell something remarkably similar in return.

Later on... "There's a time and a place for senseless violence (sic) and if you don't happen to agree, meet me behind the stadium after the show and I'll break you like a dry twig!"

Oh go suck a lemon Wally and go back to the used car-lot where you belong. Total crap.

Steve Griffiths



SCREEN CLASSIC

INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS

The young doctor (Kevin McCarthy) and his old flame (Dana Wynter) seem destined to become yet another Handsome American Couple, but a few troublesome incidents threaten their security: recognize her uncle, a father suddenly seems... strange. Gradually horror invades their comfortable little town, and reaches out to embrace their world.

Don Siegal's early science-fiction feature has worn well: Hollywood remade it in 1978 (with Donald Sutherland as the hero), and serious film critics have begun to treat it as emblematic of the American Psyche of the McCarthy Era. The durability of such a film is somewhat surprising. It was based upon an unremarkable pulp novella by Jack Finney, and was ignored by reviewers when released in 1956. Its subject was commonplace enough: however it is explained, whatever technological or theological machinery is invoked, possession is a familiar concept. The particular attraction of the movie seems to lie in its combination of commonplace setting and an earnest (even insensitive) hero, with the assertion of an inexorable extra-terrestrial conspiracy. The style--deadpan and unsophisticated for the most part--heightens the contrast between the ordinary setting and the extraordinary events. At the

same time Siegel is restrained and even subtle in his use of violence and special effects. The explicit depiction of the grotesque which reduces so many science fiction films to the level of empty spectacle is largely lacking; fear is established through the accumulation of relatively innocuous incidents. Body Snatchers provides a classic example of terror asserting itself in the midst of the mundane. The horror lies not in the difference that marks the Pod People, but in their eerie sameness. There ought to be some sign to mark the vampires among us, we feel; there is something terrifying about an evil so cunningly normal.

Siegel probed the human susceptibility to insecurity with a sure hand. His film has had countless imitators, including television's current War of the Worlds series, which owes at least as much to Siegel as to Byron Haskin (and nothing at all to H.G. Wells). Together with such classics as Forbidden Planet (an exact contemporary), It Came From Outer Space, and When Worlds Collide, Invasion of the Body Snatchers created the modern science fiction film, and continues to exert a powerful influence on the genre.

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