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NYP TV WEEK

● REALLY BIG SHOWS

Day One

Mondays are looking up



On ABC's *'Veritas'* a father/son archaeology team attempts to uncover the 'truth' of a hidden past.

By Michael Giltz

THE future of television can be found on Monday nights.

Instead of one or two networks dominating in the ratings, every channel has something to offer that smartly counter-programs its competitors and gets good enough ratings to justify their existence in a 150 channel universe.

You can see it on Tuesdays and Sundays as well, but no other night offers such a well-balanced menu for the TV audience. Someday, every night will look like this lineup.

CBS had the strongest hold on Mondays in the past, thanks to quality sitcoms like *"M*A*S*H"* and *"Murphy Brown."* That tradition continues with *"Everybody Loves Raymond,"* a slow-building hit that the network nurtured. It's surrounded by *"King of Queens"* (which some think is a worthy successor), the critical punching bag *"Yes, Dear"* and *"Still Standing,"* which looks like it might get into fighting trim by the end of the season. Topping it off is *"C.S.I. Miami,"* the surest bet of the fall that has

delivered on every level. It's a lineup perfect for older couples and families.

NBC offers three one-hour blocks as an alternative, starting with the low-brow reality show *"Fear Factor,"* which is still scoring higher in the ratings than even Ripley could imagine. That's followed by the durable soap-drama *"Third Watch"* and *"Crossing Jordan,"* the freshman hit starring Jill Hennessy that took a hit from *"C.S.I. Miami"* but is still standing. It's an anonymous but good-looking alternative to CBS's sitcoms. Perfect for single women.

Fox has its strongest drama hit with *"Boston Public,"* the last man standing when it comes to David Kelly hours. It's holding the fort almost alone, offering a ripped-from-the-headlines feel with its tawdry storylines (those students sure do get in trouble!) and a fine ensemble. It's followed by a rotating mix of reality shows like *"Joe Millionaire"* that give the *"Fear Factor"* crowd somewhere to turn. Perfect for young people.

The WB hits a wholesome note with *"7th Heaven"* and the burgeoning hit *"Everwood,"* a sort of *"Northern Exposure"* for the Walton set that stars Treat

Williams and Tiger Beat pin-up Gregory Smith, as the thinking-teen's hunk. Perfect for young families and kids.

UPN offers as solid a block of sitcoms as you'll find in primetime, anchored by *"Girlfriends."* Although of variable quality, they hit their target audience every week whether in reruns or with brand new episodes. Perfect for African Americans who are tired of seeing blacks play authority figures in the background of other shows.

And ABC has a winner for half the year with *"Monday Night Football"* (perfect for single guys) and now a brand new block of dramas led by *"The Practice"* at 9, the Indiana Jones-style *"Veritas"* at 8 and *"Miracles"* with Skeet Ulrich at 10.

The amazing thing is that all of these lineups are successful. Every network can point to an audience they zero in on that advertisers want.

In the future, every night will be this crowded with success stories, once networks realize they can't afford to roll over and play dead opposite hit shows — the way everyone did on Thursdays when NBC ruled the roost.

But on Mondays, the future is now.