

The Freshman

The bright young things of the TV seasons aren't all kids. Not this year. Who are the people everyone's talking about? A genetically engineered kick-ass girl, a school principal played by a man whose last show was a notorious flop, a gorgeous Republican — and a Brooklyn guy who used to be a contender.

By MICHAEL GILTZ



Emily Procter: Her career highlight was playing Mavis in the TV movie "The Dukes of Hazzard: Reunion."



Alexis Bledel: She's so young but has a love for old movies.

EMILY PROCTER

Age: 32
Hometown: Raleigh, N.C.
Character: Ainsley Hayes, a Republican addition to the White House staff all "West Wing" (NBC, Wednesdays at 9). Provides a little right-wing balance in this day of an evenly divided Congress.
Star quality: An understated, distinctly feminine sexiness combined with a keen intellect that keeps Rob Lowe's character especially off-balance.
Character's favorite snack: a chocolate muffin and a French chateaufort.
Telling trait: garnered tiny roles in very bad movies, particularly "Jerry Maguire" and "Leaving Las Vegas."
First TV/movie role: while studying journalism and dance at East Carolina University, Procter became the weather anchor for the Greenville CBS affiliate.
Career highlight: surely playing Mavis in the TV movie "The Dukes of Hazzard: Reunion."

CHI MCBRIDE

Age: undisclosed
Hometown: Chicago
Character: Principal Steven Harper in "Boston Public" (Ch. 5, Mondays at 8), the new drama from David E. Kelley that focuses on the teachers in a public school. One of the better reviewed and most commercially successful new shows of the season.
Star quality: A quiet authority that leaves no question who is in charge (even if he's willing to accept and-guess his sternness when others aren't around).
Favorite snack: upward-staring students; he eats them for lunch.
Telling trait: Also acted under the pseudonym of "Chi."
First TV/movie role: "Revenge of the Nerds III: The Next Generation."
Career highlight: Starred in the title role of "The Secret Diary

of Desmond Pfeiffer," one of the most famous and notorious flops in recent television history.

ALEXIS BLEDEL

Age: 18
Hometown: Houston
Character: Rory Gilmore in "Gilmore Girls" (Ch. 11, Thursdays at 8). A sensible 16-year-old, Rory lives in Stars Hollow, Conn., with her flighty but loving single mom (Lauren Graham of "NewsRadio").
The show's: a nicely reviewed little surprise but is stuck in a treacherous timeslot.
Star quality: A Christina Ricci-like coolness combined with a love for old movies.
Character's favorite snack:

chili fries, or whatever her mom's having.
Telling trait: Took community theater at her parent's urging to overcome shyness. Modeled during high school.
First TV/movie role: you're looking at it.
Career highlight: Ditto. She's a really new face.

WILLIAM PETERSEN

Age: 47
Hometown: Evanston, Ill.
Character: Gil Grissom in "CSI: Crime Scene Investigators" (Ch. 2, Fridays at 9). The intense leader of a crack team

that can dig under fingernails or dissect a corpse's mangled to retrace the steps of a bad guy.
CS.I. is the breakout hit of the year, regularly outdrawing its much more highly touted lead-in "The Fugitive."
Star quality: makes brooding intensity seem appealing.
Character's favorite snack: who can eat with all those gross-out details at the crime scene?
Telling trait: wears the football jersey from his high school in every role possible.
First TV/movie role: Michael Mann's "Heat," followed by the lead in Mann's underrated gem "Manhunter," which first featured Hamish Lecter and had Petersen

tackling duties for the FBI similar to what he's performing on "CS.I."
Career highlight: Played both patriarch Joseph P. Kennedy in "The Kennedys of Massachusetts" and John F. Kennedy in HBO's "The Rat Pack".

JESSICA ALBA

Age: 19
Hometown: Pomona, Calif.
Character: Max in James Cameron's "Dark Angel" (Ch. 5, Tuesdays at 9). A smashing debut and holding its own against "Frasier" and the similarly-named "Buffy" spin-off "Angel."
Star quality: those lips, those

Class



Chi McBride: He starred in the title role of "The Secret Diary of Desmond Pfeiffer," and hopes you forget.



William Petersen: He tangled with Hamish Lecter in the movie "Manhunter" and survived.



Jessica Alba: Those lips, those skin-tight outfits, those killer moves.



Tony Danza: Beefs up the cast of "Family Law" as a guy named Joe.

World of Alex Mack

Career highlight: took her first acting class at the age of 12; got an agent nine months later.

TONY DANZA

Age: 49
Hometown: Brooklyn
Character: Joe Celano on "Family Law" (Ch. 2, Mondays at 10). A surprise, commercial hit last season that needed to level up its male appeal — hence the addition of Danza.
Telling trait: her dad was in the Air Force, so Alba bounced around the country (Illinois, Mississippi, Los Angeles, Texas) when she was growing up.
First TV/movie role: a young snob on Nickelodeon's "The Secret

include him.)
Star quality: A guy's guy, Danza is a brusque, no-nonsense lawyer who does what it takes to win for his clients. Plays it straight here, but the twinkle in his eye is a reminder that he used to be big in comedy.
Character's favorite snack: Italian, of course.
Telling trait: broke his back sking in Utah in '93; plates ribs and screws holding his spine in place.
First TV/movie role: apparently also had a role on a sitcom called "Taxi."
Career highlight: finally playing a character not named Tony

skin-tight outfits, those killer moves. Did we mention she's genetically engineered?
Character's favorite snack: anything that doesn't have a bar code stamped on it (Max has one on her neck).
Telling trait: her dad was in the Air Force, so Alba bounced around the country (Illinois, Mississippi, Los Angeles, Texas) when she was growing up.
First TV/movie role: a young snob on Nickelodeon's "The Secret