

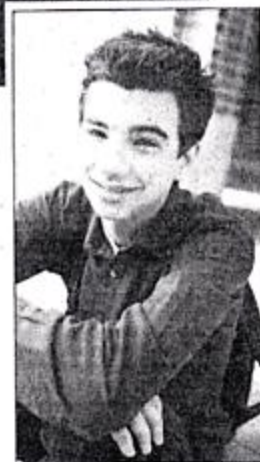
TV Sunday

Stayin' alive

These four faces will go places



Guaranteed to last even if their new-season shows don't (clockwise from above): Simon Baker ("The Guardian"), Jay Baruchel ("Undeclared"), Jelena Blalock ("Enterprise") and Melissa George ("Thieves").



MELISSA GEORGE

Age/availability: 25; married
Hometown: Perth, Australia
Character: Rita, a thief who'd rather fight than switch on ABC's "Thieves" (Fridays at 9)
Career breakthrough: "I came second in the junior world for skating," says George, "and I'd been doing that since I was 5. After that I was modeling, but it was only in Perth. Then I went to Sydney and did [the TV soap] "Home and Away" for four years. The show had been running for eight years about a foster family that takes in kids that don't have parents. I played a street kid, a sort of risky role for that show. I got Best Actress at our equivalent of the Emmys."
Look for: her turn in David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive*. "I'm the girl that the director is forced to cast in his movie. I come out with '60s hair and a

pink dress and sing, 'Why can't I have you, oh baby?' Then the director says, 'This is the girl.' Later, I come back when the director announces his engagement and start kissing this girl. That's David Lynch for you."
Believe it or not: She actually didn't pose nude for Australian *Playboy*. "It wasn't really nude and it was a photo shoot they bought," explains George.
Show's status: Not so great. "Thieves" has always improved on its lead-in, but critics predictably haven't rallied around this very entertaining fluff.

MOST new TV shows won't last. But many of their stars will. (Jenna Elfman of "Dharma & Greg" shot to fame in the short-lived sitcom "Townies.") Here are the faces to watch from this year's crop: an uptight lawyer, a master thief, a sexy Vulcan and a freshman at college.

SIMON BAKER

Age/availability: 32; married
Hometown: Sydney, Australia. "I miss going for a surf with my friends," admits Baker.
Character: the uptight, high-powered attorney Nick Fallin, forced into community service for a drug offense on CBS's "The Guardian" (Tuesdays at 9). "He's compassionate, but also very afraid of letting himself be vulnerable," says Baker.

Career breakthrough: Australian TV show "E Street" and a memorable turn as the naive actor/pay hustler in *L.A. Confidential*. Less memorable? The film *Red Planet*. "That was a bizarre shoot," says Baker.

Look for: His lead role as a gigolo in the costume drama *The Affair of the Necklace* (due out Nov.30) with Hilary Swank.

Believe it or not: His numerous name changes - including Simon Denny, Simon Denny-Baker and Denny Baker - are no joke. "It's not like I was trying to come up with the perfect porn star name," says Baker. "I was born Simon Baker."

"My name was changed by my stepfather to Denny. When I had my first child, I found my real father and developed a relationship and I wanted my child to grow up as Baker. I had an emotional hangover with my stepfather and I changed my name to Baker-Denny."

"It took me to 30 to realize who I really always was - Simon Baker. And I disconnected from my stepfather and did the full circle."

Show's status: Rock solid. "The Guardian" - picked up for a full season - is a Top 20 hit and continues to grow its audience every week.

JOLENE BLALOCK

Age/availability: 26; single but linked at one point to Edward Furlong
Hometown: San Diego, California

Character: T'Pol, the sexy, smart, and intentionally droll Vulcan on UPN's "Enterprise" (Wednesdays at 8)

Career breakthrough: playing Medea in the miniseries *Jason and the Argonauts*.

Look for: her photos all over the web. Blalock is the biggest Internet hit since Gillian Anderson joined "The X-Files."

Believe it or not: She's that rare woman who actually loves the old "Star Trek" series, reportedly enough to turn down the role on the umpteenth spin-

off several times until she actually read the script.

Show's status: "Enterprise" can expect a five year mission, at the very least.

JAY BARUCHEL

Age/availability: 19
Hometown: Ottawa, Ontario Canada

Character: not-so-geeky college freshman Steven Karp on Fox's "Undeclared," Tuesdays at 8:30.

Career breakthrough: the lead in the Canadian children's show "My Hometown," a syrupy show with a moral at the end of every episode that - bizarrely - aired at 10:30 at night.

Look for: his role as Harry in the movie *The Rules of Attraction*. "I play one of a group of four posh gay kids," says Baruchel. "I try to kill myself because I find out I was adopted. I try to



kill myself by drinking too much bad Scotch. So of course, I don't die. It's just a ridiculously flamboyant thing."

Believe it or not: He was still too shy to talk much with *Rules of Attraction* costars James Van Der Beek, Eric Stoltz and Faye Dunaway. "I kind of always assume people don't want to be around me," laughs Baruchel.

Show's status: Solid. Picked up for a full season, "Undeclared" is a critic's darling and doing decently in the ratings, with enough 18-34 demos to make it a winner for Fox.

