

TELEVISION EUNY HONG-KORAL

Fears that nobody cares about

Good science fiction films should have the structure of Greek mythology. They warn of the pitfalls of our own hubris and tap into our deepest fears: loss of identity, loss of autonomy, being completely alone. Conversely, bad science fiction taps into fears that nobody cares about except the careless scriptwriter who is rushing to make his deadline.

For example: are you worried that US libertarianism will become so powerful that suicide will become legalised in the near future, thereby allowing the wealthy to purchase vital organs wantonly and without restraint? A TNT original film, *Race Against Time*, would have us believe that this is a blood-curdling proposition requiring our immediate attention. (TNT. Sunday, July 23 at 8pm ET/PT.)

The film begins, inauspiciously, with text scrolling at a snail's pace up the screen to explain the film's premise - a device that should only be reserved for *Star Wars* films or parodies thereof.

We learn that: "In 2008, the Supreme Court of the United States determined all statutes criminalising suicide to be unconstitutional."

And here's my favourite line from the whole film: "The court reasoned: 'If we are endowed with the inalienable right to life, then we must also be endowed with the inalienable right to death.'"

A large corporation called Lifecorps has found a way to profit from this most important of personal freedoms.

They find suicidal individuals and offer them \$300,000 to enjoy for one year, at the end of which they are expected to commit suicide, and have all their vital organs harvested.

Keep in mind, however, that murder is not legal, only suicide, so the company has to screen for people who are so organised that they can anticipate having suicidal tendencies 12 months in advance.

One man, our protagonist,

he has no other way to pay for his dying son's operation.

The boy has contracted a fatal, rapidly spreading virus for which there is a ready cure, but as the physician explains: "Your account at the hospital is long past due, and I will not be permitted to administer the vaccine until you have settled your balance."

Is this the real message here, that the US should provide universal healthcare? Who can say?

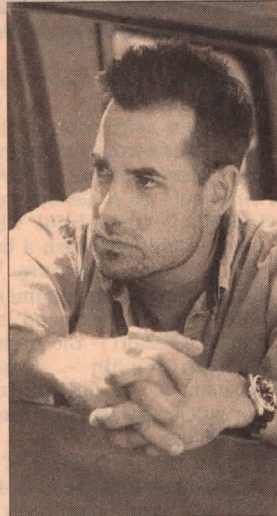
Some of the programming this summer has been so unbearable that I have considered jumping out of the window myself.

The new comedy series *Opposite Sex* premiered in late June with the misleadingly racy premise that a formerly all-girls high school has decided to admit three boys. (Fox. Wednesdays at 8pm.)

The boys feel ostracised, and no wonder: the cafeteria only serves salad. When all other attempts at assimilation fail, the lads perform Gloria Gaynor's *I Will Survive* in drag. For some reason, this works.

Another new series debuting this summer, *Mysterious Ways*, is about a maverick anthropologist named Dunn who wants to prove that miracles exist - not for any explicit religious reason, just for his own personal edification and for the right to act sententiously and condescendingly to those around him.

The programme appears to be banking on the combined success of *The X Files* and *Touched by an Angel*, and the "psychokinetic energy" in this programme is way



Miracle hunter: Adrian Pasdar in NBC's 'Mysterious Ways'

above normal, to paraphrase *Ghostbusters*. (NBC. Premieres Monday, July 24 at 8pm ET/PT.)

In the season premiere, Dunn (played by Adrian Pasdar) investigates the case of a boy who fell through the ice, died, then mysteriously recovered. The boy claims that during his brief period of death, he saw

"sparkly things", and "the hand" rescued him.

Just in case we are too dim to understand what the boy is getting at, the song *Amazing Grace* plays stridently in the background.

The boy is not the only one who is brain-dead in this production. Here's the rest of the story: Dunn discovers a "rational" explanation. To wit, a mentally ill homeless woman rescued the boy and dropped a bag of stolen laundry quarters into the lake, hence the sparkly things. But no, she doesn't own a Greek Orthodox cross, so it's a miracle after all.

If you think this writing is intolerable, then you may not be able to handle what passes for a theological discussion in this programme. The show's obligatory sceptic wants to know: "If there is a [higher power], then how come this boy was spared while others were not?"

I often ask myself the same question about certain bad television shows.

Ian Rosenblatt Presents
José CURA
 (tenor)

Music by
 Leoncavallo
 Bizet
 Verdi
 Puccini

Carlos ALVAREZ
 (baritone)

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