Buck Rogers in the 25th Century (NBC, Thursdays) is the latest incarnation of the futuristic stranger in a strange land. The spaceman’s 50-year-plus history has featured him in every conceivable medium from novels to comic strips to the current TV series.

Buck’s 1980 video excursion remains faithful to the spirit of the 1928 original. William “Buck” Rogers (Gil Gerard), a 20th-century astronaut, is returning from a deep-space mission when an accident quick-freezes him for nearly 500 years.

After Buck is thawed from his slumber, the adventurer finds himself a curiosity to the sterile, super-scientific civilization that exists in scattered pockets of the post-Armageddon world.

He is soon befriended by several inhabitants of his old/new planet. Among these new acquaintances are Dr. Huer of the Defense Directorate (Tim O’Connor) and Wilma Deering (Erin Gray); Buck and Wilma’s relationship, you could say, is not exactly all business. The Directorate is in charge of protecting world security and Buck’s 20th-century expertise is frequently tapped to keep Earth safe from a variety of menaces.

The series is a perfect medium for a host of alien planets, and space travel is common, which often leads Buck off to the far corners of the Universe. He may be called upon to squelch a civil war or prevent an attack against Earth, but the spaceman always succeeds in his mission with grand style and fun.

In fact, a strong sense of humor is a major ingredient of NBC’s SF opus. The series’ producer, Glen Larson, turned Buck Rogers in the direction of melodramatic spoof as opposed to the somber seriousness of his other space opera—Battlestar: Galactica. The canny Rogers is just as likely to succeed with a Burt Reynolds-type con game as he is with a laser pistol; he’s proven skillful with both.

Buck himself is often unstaged by the antics of his diminutive robot sidekick, Twikki (deftly pantomimed by Felix Silla and voiced by audio whiz Mel Blanc). The comical, doll-like droid has acquired a prodigious vocabulary of 20th-century slang (much of it off-color) and seldom misses an opportunity to use it.

Originally planned as three, two-hour made-for-TV movies, the initial stanza served as a pilot film and eventually found its way into theatrical release. The paying customers demonstrated their acceptance so well that NBC needed no further convincing to pick up Buck as a weekly offering.

Under producers Larson and Bruce Lansbury (Wonder Woman, Fantastic Journey), Buck Rogers began its first season by quickly toppling Laverne & Shirley, as well as denting The Waltons’ following. Pretty good for a show that wasn’t expected to last more than 13 weeks.

After some frantic schedule-shifting by the competition, Buck found himself up against a fellow-spaceman named Mork, but the series has been performing nicely just the same. The network jury is still out for Buck at this writing (early April), but the unofficial
word has it that the show will be around for a second season.

Some of Buck’s sense of fun comes from the many gags designed to tease alert SF fans. For example, the public-address speaker at a busy spaceport might suddenly page a “Dr. Adam Strange” or “Captain Christopher Pike” while a scene is in progress. The series blasted off in October with the ultimate in-joke as Buster Crabbe, Buck Rogers (and Flash Gordon) of the 1930s movie serials, guested as a thinly disguised Commander Gordon. After climbing into a spacecraft cockpit for the first time in 40 years, Gordon tells Buck, “I’ve been doing this sort of thing since before you were born.”

Production values for the series (sets, costumes) are top-notch, with frequent use of exotic outdoor locations. The special effects from Universal’s Hartland facilities have been consistently fine, while not the overpowering variety in Galactica. These effects are of the quality and slickness viewers have come to know.

In order to win a steady audience, Buck Rogers has attempted a different approach to TV science fiction: humor and fun. At this point, the formula seems to be working well.

**Battlestar: Galactica** is following in the footsteps of *Star Trek* as a science-fiction TV series that refuses to die.

In its original version, *Galactica* debuted in September 1978, on ABC, as a special, three-hour telefilm. Interest in the new program had been carefully nurtured by a cover story in *Newsweek* and exposure in a variety of other media. And with *Star Wars* still fresh in the public mind, *Galactica* seemed to have a ripened audience for its swashbuckling adventure.

An immense, space-faring battlecruiser, the *Galactica* is the flagship of a roaming band of vessels searching the cosmos for the mythical planet of its origin—Earth. Lead by the patriarchal Commander Adama (Lorne Greene), the fleet struggles forth under the constant shadow of attack from the Imperious Leader and his sinister legion of Cylon warriors. Sworn to the extinction of human beings throughout the Universe, these robotic stormtroopers pursued the *Galactica* fleet undauntedly.

Crewmembers aboard the ship included Adama’s son, Apollo (Richard Hatch), and daughter, Athena (Maren Jensen). Along with the dashing Lt. Starbuck (Dirk Benedict), the trio was frequently drawn into battle against the dreaded Cylon Empire, in addition to other alien menaces.

Totaling over $1 million per hour episode (nearly three times the cost of a regular program), *Galactica* featured some of the most impressive sets and special-effects footage ever produced for small-screen consumption. ABC and Universal expressed doubts about breaking even on their tremendous investment, however no expense was spared in making the series, and the production crew and actors often toiled through seven-day work weeks.

After the pilot aired on television, an edited version was released theatrically, glorified by a rumbiling sensuous surround, effect, to recapou a portion of the astronomical expenses. Surprisingly, it performed well at the box office, hinting at *Galactica*’s enormous popularity. The results encouraged Universal to announce release of a second edited feature, but this never came about.

While *Galactica* received mixed reactions from hardcore science-fiction fans, the public at-large welcomed the initial episodes with high Nielsen ratings. But the fantastic ratings decreased on a steady slide as viewers lost interest; ultimately, the network shelved the series entirely. While not exactly termed a flop, *Galactica*’s lukewarm ratings did not—in ABC’s opinion—justify such huge production costs.

In an effort to further absorb the negative costs, Universal quickly fashioned several two-hour movies from individual episodes and marketed them into syndication to local stations. They are scheduled to begin airing shortly.

After *Galactica*’s departure, rumors flew that the show’s producer, Glen Larson, was planning a special film that would feature the spacemen’s discovery of their lost earth. This came to reality in January in the form of *Galactica: 1980*.

The format of *Galactica: 1980* differs radically from its predecessor. The emphasis on aliens and space hardware has given way to a time-travel motif, and the series now concentrates on people stories. In the pilot for a new series, the Galacticians journey into various periods of Earth’s past and attempt to prevent history from being altered in favor of the evil Cylons.

Along with the new storyline comes new cast members. Apollo and Starbuck are gone, replaced instead by Kent McCord (Troy) and Barry Van Dyke (Dillon), now featured in the starring berths. And providing a link with the previous series, familiar Lorne Greene reprises his role of Adama.

Aired in three, one-hour segments, *Galactica: 1980* performs well enough that ABC has ordered a handful of new episodes for the spring season. Whether or not the show will return for a full season in 1980-81 is a decision which has not yet been made. It all depends—once again—on those all-powerful Nielsen numbers.

**Salvage One** served successful duty as an ABC replacement series last year and returned for a handful of episodes during the 1979-80 schedule.

While it could not exactly be termed science-fiction, *Salvage One* contains many elements to interest fans of the genre. In its first season (1979), the trio journeys to the Moon aboard a patchwork rocket, hunts the legendary Abominable Snowman, battles a
Salvage One: Why are they smiling? (From #25, p. 12)
military killer-robot — and that was just for starters.

The Salvage One trio, headed by Harry
Broderick (Andy Griffith), went on to tackle
more mundane chores such as rescuing
American astronauts stranded in space and
moving an enormous iceberg blocking
shipping lanes. Healthy ratings, however, seemed
more difficult to corral and ABC scrapped
the series. Trish Steward and Joel Higgins
also starred.

Close on the heels of Close Encounters,
Project UFO focused on the U.S. Air Force’s
Project Bluebook, an official study on
Unidentified Flying Objects. Officers Ryan
and Fitz pursue UFO reports across the coun-
try in an attempt to document these alleged
contacts as either truth or fiction.

If the stoic, “just-the-facts” approach to
Project UFO seemed like a SF version of
Dragnet, it is certainly no coincidence. The
series’ producer, Jack Webb, starred and
directed many of the police dramas and
brought the same approach to his new pro-
duction.

While Project UFO only achieved mediocre success, use of spacecraft
miniatures and alien beings added a dash of
color to the straightforward proceedings.
After bouncing around in several different
time periods, Project UFO’s anemic ratings
forced its cancellation.

Trying a second time to make it as a weekly
series, Captain America roared through
another CBS pilot movie last November.

As a two-part adventure, the Marvel Com-
ics superhero followed the blueprint set forth
in his first outing. Blond, suntanned Steve
Rogers (Rob Brown) is the beneficiary of a

The Hulk: Other superheroes are green with envy. (From #26, p. 44)
super-soldier formula that gives him extraor-
dinary strength and reflexes.

When the initial pilot film aired last year,
CBS was pleased by the impressive ratings—
but unhappy with the end product. Captain
America was sent back for more fine-tuning
and a change of uniform.

The patriotic avenger was aided in his sec-
ond attempt by the stylish villainy of
Christopher Lee; but the good Captain still
failed to make the grade for a regular berth.

The Amazing Spider-Man put in various
web-slinging appearances during the year by
way of scattered special episodes.

As one of several comic book heroes
transferred to the small screen, Spider-Man
(Peter Parker/Nicholas Hammond) con-
fronts a variety of strange menaces. One seg-
ment pits the crimefighter against a mind-
control plot, while another features ghosts
and a haunted house.

Ellen Bry joined the cast as Julie, a news
photographer who gave Parker some tough
competition. Robert F. Simon returned as the
cantankerous Jonah Jameson, chief of the
Daily Bugle.

Public response to the specials was only
lukewarm and the network declined to pick
up Spider-Man for 1979-80 duty. The
episodes were used to plug sudden holes in the
CBS schedule and often aired with little or no
advance notice.

Cliffhangers was an NBC attempt to
recreate the episodic movie serials of the
1930s and 40s.

The hour-long program was comprised of
three separate stories, two which held par-
ticular appeal to fans of the fantastic.
"The Secret Empire" features a two-fisted cowboy who battles the conquering forces of an underground super-civilization. The chapterplay features Geoffrey Scott as Marshal Jim Donner and Trek's Mark Lenard as the tyrant Thorslaw.

"The Curse of Dracula" transplants the Transylvanian count to modern-day Los Angeles where he moonlights as a college professor. Dracula also finds himself involved as much with the ladies as with the occult, finally placing the bit on a number of California women.

Produced by Kenneth Johnson (The Hulk), Cliffhangers failed to catch the interest of a new generation of serial viewers.

The Incredible Hulk's third CBS season found the monster's human half, David Banner (Bill Bixby), still searching for a way to control his Jekyll/Hyde transformations.

Focusing on people and their problems, the scriptwriters have guided the green-skinned goliath across the paths of such individuals as a self-destructive rock star, a psychic who threatens to reveal Banner's terrible secret—and, of course, the ever-pursuing reporter, McGee (Jack Colvin).

Star Bixby doubled as director of several episodes; his wife, Brenda Benet, and former My Favorite Martian co-star, Ray Walston, even managed to get into the act in guest spots.

Many consider muscleman-turned-actor Lou Ferrigno as the real star of the show. The 6'5" weight lifter must endure daily rigors of a three-hour makeup session to physically become the Hulk's green-hued self. Add to that the time Ferrigno must spend at the gym to maintain his amazing physique and viewers begin to realize his contribution to the teleseries.

The series' guiding force, Kenneth Johnson, emphatically states that he does not want The Hulk to be just a "monster" show. The producer has strived to present adult themes that will appeal to all ages and tastes. And as the program is all but assured of a fourth season, Johnson appears to have realized this goal.

TV's visitor from the planet Ork, Mork, returned for another ABC season last fall.

Little Mork was a big hit. (From #29, p. 49)

Mork and Mindy features the comical adventures of a naive alien (Robin Williams) as he copes with American society.

The popular series debuted for its second lap with an hour-long send-up of the classic science-fiction film, The Incredible Shrinking Man.

Titled 'Mork in Wonderland,' the outer-space observer takes a decongestant to shrink his membranes and prevent him from sneezing; unfortunately, the medicine affects all of him as Mork dwindles down to a mere couple of inches.

Employing a variety of electronic special effects—including the popular Magicam process—the special episode was of particular interest to fans of the original movie, as well as launching Mork off to an unusual start.

Later in the season, Bob Short's Robby the Robot made a guest appearance as a museum guard who is about to be put to pasture against his will. Actor Roddy McDowell provided the distinctive voice for Mork's mechanical friend.

Williams, who in real-life is a science-fiction enthusiast, often adds humorous references to the genre in his wildly comic performances. Mork and Mindy will be back for a third year next fall.

A British science-fiction hero, Dr. Who made his stateside television debut during this past year. A package of the good Doctor's way-out adventures was made available to American viewers and won him a legion of fans this side of the ocean.

As a Time Lord, Dr. Who (Tom Baker)
dashes through the past and future, outer-space and other dimensional planes, accompanied by his young assistants. In the course of events, these travelers encounter a variety of strange alien creatures and universe-shaking dangers.

Dr. Who has served as a staple of English broadcasting for over 15 years; it ranks as one of the biggest hits in BBC history. Today it has captured the fancy of U.S. fans; a Dr. Who convention was recently called to order and drew over a thousand participants.

Tom Baker is familiar to SF enthusiasts as the co-star of such films as The Golden Voyage of Sinbad and The Mutations. Previous Dr. Whos include Peter Cushing, who portrayed the scientist in a feature film (Dr. Who and the Daleks).

Dr. Who's invasion of America has included a plethora of games, novels and other merchandising designed for the hero's adoring public. Marvel Comics has introduced a one-shot version of the Doctor's exploits.

It took Dr. Who over a decade and a half to journey to America; to many it was well worth the wait.

The long-delayed telecast of Ray Bradbury's The Martian Chronicles finally occurred last January and met with both critical and fan approval.

The three-part miniseries dramatized several of Bradbury's short stories about the red planet and its many secrets. While the author penned the tales independently, Rock Hudson's portrayal of astronaut Col. Wilder serves to link the various segments together.

The small-screen adaptation by Richard Matheson (scripter of Kolchak: The Night Stalker, Twilight Zone, etc.) contains much of the original prose's flavor and spirit.

Assisted by an all-star cast (Darren McGavin, Roddy McDowall, Bernadette Peters), Chronicles achieved a rare distinction for television SF—success both critically and ratings-wise.

Another SF novelist brought his—or in this case her—work to television in the form of PBS' movie adaptation of Ursula K. LeGuin's The Lathe of Heaven.

The time is the 21st century and a young man (Bruce Davison) discovers that during sleep his wild dreams ultimately are transformed into reality. When a psychiatrist (Kevin Conway) suggests methods to achieve 'safe dreaming,' the doctor soon loses perspective and instructs the young man to fashion his personal conception of Utopia.

The SF tale is set on an Earth where the polar ice caps have melted, from air pollution and the threat of invasion hangs heavy from aliens who have landed on the Moon.

LeGuin served as creative consultant for the two-hour film based on her 1971 novel. The Lathe of Heaven also served as a pilot for a proposed series of SF films for PBS.

The Aliens Are Coming is another treatment of the extraterrestrials-come-to-colonize-Earth plot that featured a few different twists.

Disembodied visitors from a dying planet land in the Nevada desert and attempt to gather information about their adopted home by inhabiting the bodies of influential humans.

Once these aliens take possession of an individual, the host's eyes sparkle with electricity and instantly hypnotize anyone standing in their way. An ex-astronaut (Tom Mason) attempts peaceful contact with the invaders, but instead becomes a target for their hostility and must battle for his life.

Scripted by Robert Lenski and directed by Harvey Hart, this Quinn Martin production is a pilot for a proposed NBC series.

Brave New World, based on the 1932 Aldous Huxley novel, takes place in a 25th-century Earth where science has solved every problem and grants every wish. As a result, the Utopian society lives solely for pleasure and eternal youth—but basic human spirit has suffered greatly.

However, several dissident savages, hanging on to the values of ancient times, come to disrupt the status quo and challenge the civilization's misdirected values.

The production of Brave New World languished on NBC's shelf for well over a year until it was unspooled last March. Actor Christopher Tabori starred as John Savage, as an "aboriginal" who confronts the almost-perfect system.

Bud Cort, Marcia Strasman and Ron O'Neal rounded out the cast of the three-hour TV movie.

Another TV pilot for a new series arrived on NBC last January—Dr. Franken—a movie that featured actor Robert Vaughn as a modern-day subscriber to the Dr. Frankenstein school of surgery.

Scientist Vaughn starts out with a corpse and then transplants organs removed from the bodies of others. What he winds up with is a perfectly formed man; however, the creation suffers greatly from faulty emotional construction. As a result, the patchwork person becomes involved with a number of dangerous situations—including murder.

Robert Perutz portrayed the creature (called 841); Cynthia Harris and Terri Garr (of Close Encounters fame) figured as some of the important women in his life.

The storyline of Dr. Franken remained open-ended to allow for the eventuality of a possible weekly berth on the network schedule.

Flash Gordon (NBC) made his Saturday-morning debut last fall as a cartoon series from Fimlament.

Not the typical kiddie format, Flash was granted deluxe treatment by the studio while in production. The popular spaceman received a budget and quality of work rarely afforded animated fare. Elaborate—and expensive—use of models, rotoscoping (tracing the figures of live-action performers) and other methods were used to elevate Flash...