

Special Preview

"When I heard that Buck Henry had written a television pilot script, I figured it would be good. But when I read the script and found it so incredibly funny and containing such good material, I didn't hesitate to take the role."

QUARK

A TV news feature by Tony Crawley

Richard Benjamin, last seen by most of us ensnared in Michael Chrichton's masterly **Westworld** movie, is explaining why he's returned to television after an eleven year absence.

The reason is **Quark**. "A courageous hero," says Benjamin, "facing impossible odds yet able to overcome them in a noble way. He's not quite altogether upstairs, but is trying very hard."

Move over Luke and Han, we've got a new space hero. Commander Adam Quark — a 23rd Century intergalactic garbage collector patrolling the Milky Way, picking up space trash with the help of his quite insane crew, the UGSP or United Galaxy Sanitation Patrol.

It may not be pure science fiction. But it's funny, very funny. Like Benjamin says, it has to be. Buck Henry wrote it. For the record, Buck Henry, last seen acting as David Bowie's accountant in **The Man Who Fell To Earth**, also wrote **The Graduate**, **What's Up Doc**, **Catch 22**, **The Owl and the Pussycat**. And for television he created a similar mickey-take of spies, **Get Smart**; and years and years ago the short-lived series **Captain Nice** . . . Henry's personal favourite among his numerous credits.

Sight unseen in Britain, Capt. Nice dates back to 1966 and NBC. Replete with Buck Henry's wicked satire, it starred William Daniel as your average, bespectacled, mild-mannered chemist hitting upon a formula for transforming himself into a caped crusader.

Although Buck can't exactly pinpoint the inspiration of his new shows, he does recall the name Adam Quark stems from a word game. "In scientific lingo, a quark is the smallest part of the nucleon of an atom, which in turn makes it the smallest part of an atom." Yeah, that's Quark.

Commander Quark's oddball crew don't rate much higher on the IQ scale. . . .

Twins Trisha and Cibbie Barnett are his co-pilots, Betty 1 and Betty 2 twin clones, mirror images of each other. Douglas V. Fowley (the forger from **The Money-changers**) is the ship's Rescue and Equipment Specialist, an irascible old scientist with an eye patch, the result of falling asleep at his microscope. He's called O. B. Mudd—"Dumbo backwards," adds Henry.

Tim Thomerson acts the part of the Klinger of this mashed-up outfit: a transmute chief engineer, possessing a full set of both male and female chromosomes,





armed charmer was dumped in favour of a quirky Mr. Spick send-up—Richard Kelton as Ficius, a very officious humnaoid plant. Plus the (not quite) small powerful Force . . . or rather, Source. (Or is that Sauce?) Out-doing Alec Guinness in this (voice-off) department is Hans Conreid, of blessed memory from *The 5,000 Fingers of Dr. T*

Also jettisoned as space garbage for the series were the Mudd and Palindrome characters, giving pride of co-starring to Tim Thomerson's very hectic he-she role and Kelton's Ficius. Taking over Buck Henry's wierdos from here on in for the series on NBC are writers like Steve Zacharias, Bruce Kane and Jonathan Kaufer.

These are Buck Henry's latest comic creation—the weekly stars of this welcome return to simple half-hour comedy shows,

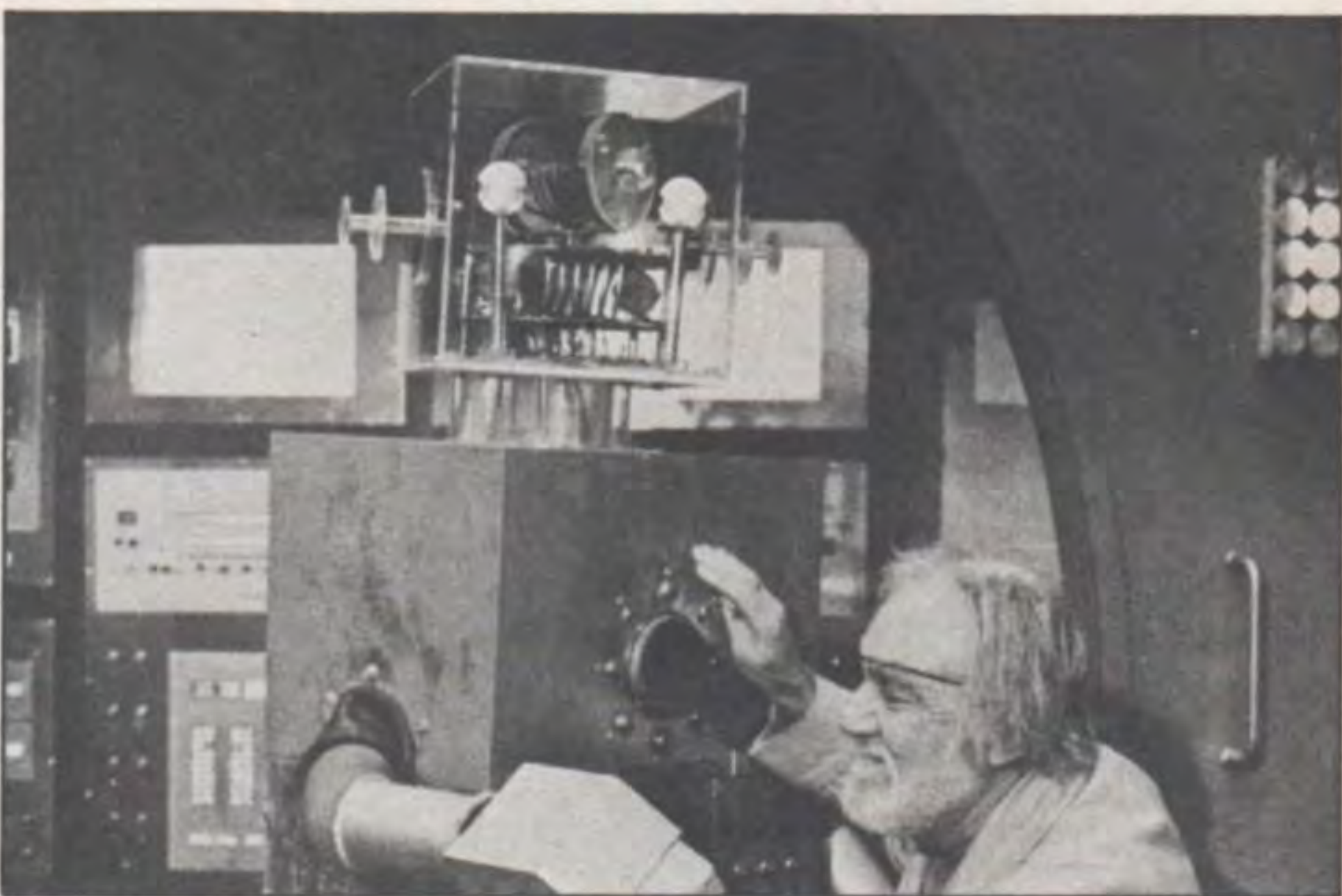
making him/her simultaneously a delicate vamp called Jean and a macho jock answering to Gene.

Stuntman Bobby Porter is the inevitable ship's robot, or servo-mechanical android, built somewhat carelessly by Dr. Mudd from a variety of spare parts, mostly, it would appear, from the space junk UGSP

Ergo is the ship's mascot. Ten pounds of congealed, shapeless protoplasm with a large eye in its mass, and a very nasty disposition. "Ergo," says producer David (Policewoman) Gerber, "is played by . . . Ergo."

All these assorted nuts take their orders from home base: Perma One. Conrad Janis is Palindrome, superintendent-in-chief. Blonde Misty Rowe (from Mel Brooks' short-lived *Robin Hood* send-up, *When Things Were Rotten*) is Interface, all gold braid and four arms. Then, of course, there's the boss—actor-writer Alain Caillou as the over-worked Secretary-General. The head man. Or indeed, just The Head . . . with a hat size of 36.

At least that was the line-up for Buck Henry's pilot. For the series, which kicked off with a full hour segment, Misty's four-



Facing page: British-born Alain Caillou as *The Head*. **Top Left:** Adam Quark (Richard Benjamin), with Betty 1, Betty 2 and scientist inventor O. B. Mudd. **Above:** O. B. Mudd (Douglas V. Fowley) and his robot creation, Andy. **Below:** Palindrome (Conrad Janis, standing) addresses an odd assortment of creatures from across the galaxy, including bespectacled, cigarette-smoking Buck Harris—the show's creator.



a pleasant departure from US-TV's over-long mini-series formats. Each week, though, brings in droves more daffy humanoids, quasi-norms, multi-peds or gravulties, which keeps Columbia's make-up teams working overtime on face-masks costing about £1,200 per mask.

The pilot show was, surprisingly, low on laughs. Buck Henry put the mix back in the melting pot before regurgitating a series that is quietly growing on Statesiders—rather like *Get Smart* did. Richard Benjamin is funnier than Don Addams ever was, but even he has to admit his show is stolen by (a) Buck Henry's mad humour and (b) Bobby Porter's robot.

Either way, when everyone else in Hollywood is getting so almighty serious about the subject, it could be fun to watch out for such episodes as: *All the Emperor's Quasi-Norms*, *May the Source be With You* and *Good-bye Polumbus*.