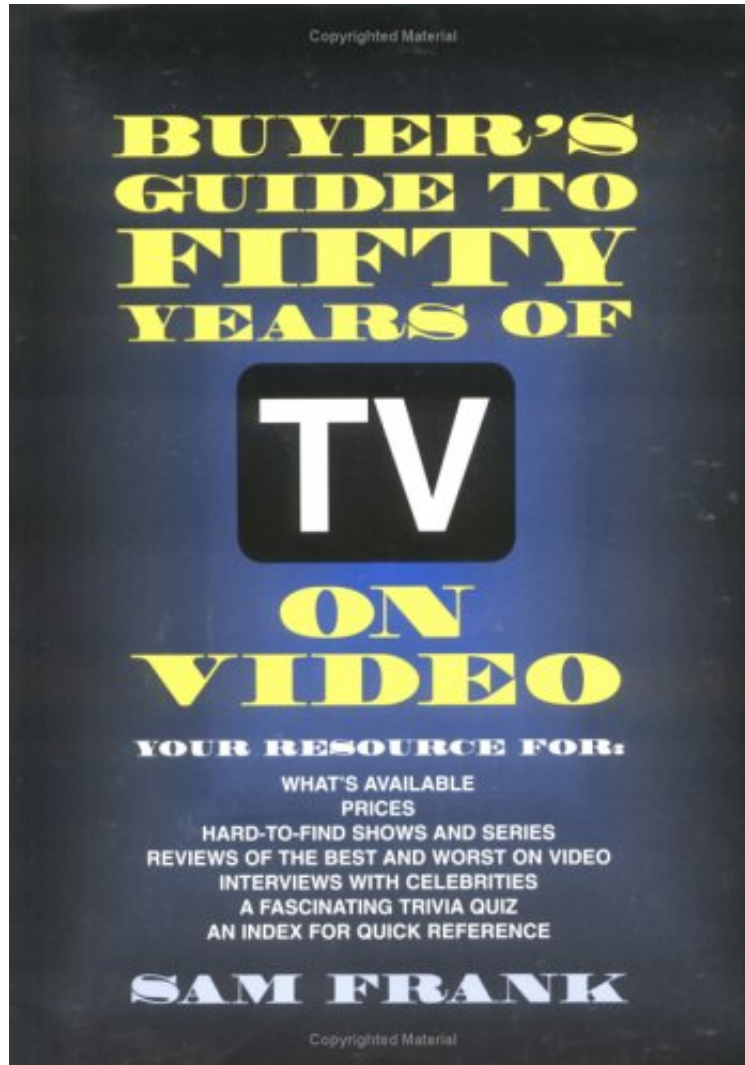


## Buyer's Guide to Fifty Years of TV on Video

*Sam Frank*

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#4926760 in Books PROMETHEUS BOOKS 1999-02Ingredients: Example IngredientsOriginal language:EnglishPDF # 1 2.10 x 6.98 x 9.78l, #File Name: 15739222691500 pages | File size: 20.Mb

**Sam Frank : Buyer's Guide to Fifty Years of TV on Video** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Buyer's Guide to Fifty Years of TV on Video:

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Too Much BiasBy A CustomerThis book ultimately has to be had because it at least provides assistance to collectors in knowing what shows are on tape. Unfortunately the style of this book is atrocious. It is almost impossible to thumb through at random because something convenient like an alphabetical heading at the top of the page to key the reader as to where he is is not provided (this especially hurts when one flips through and finds a whole page spread and no sense of where one is at all!). And frankly, Mr. Frank's personal biases and assessments of various shows are just downright annoying and guaranteed to offend more people

than inform them because he doesn't have the decency to offer a caveat at the beginning that others who don't share his politics, tastes in music etc. should take what he says about a lot of things with a grain of salt (I especially take umbrage to his characterization of *Battlestar Galactica* as a "bomb", saying not one word about Zeffirelli's "Jesus of Nazareth" one of the most important TV miniseries ever produced, and I wanted to scream shut up everytime he opened his mouth about Richard Nixon and blacklisting). A simple reference guide with equal comment for each show in a neutral manner in the tradition of Brooks/Marsh, McNeil etc. would have worked much better. Those books aren't popular because readers want to know what they think of those shows, they just want the facts. In the end, Frank comes across as a man talking down to the reader and that defeats the whole point of the project. Even on those points where I do agree with him (I too love "Our World" and the Goodson-Todman panel shows) I think it was for the most part out of place. Since Mr. Frank (who I understand has since passed away) sees fit though to talk about the errors of other reference sources, I should feel compelled to correct a goodly number that I found in just one afternoon after I bought the book.

- 1-In his review of "The Late Shift" Frank reverses the actors who played David Letterman and Jay Leno respectively.
- 2-John Brown did not leave the Burns And Allen Show because he was blacklisted. This occurred long after he had left the show, and in fact Burns did make an on camera reference to his departure as being because of "other committments." Also, Frank is dead wrong in his description of the transition from Fred Clark to Larry Keating in the Harry Morton part. First, the episode is available in the Columbia House series, and second it took place entirely with Keating.
- 3-His summation of Burns And Allen shows on tape is woefully incomplete.
- 4-NBC did not "bring" Steve Allen from New York to Hollywood in 1960, Allen personally asked for the show to move there so he could spend more time with his children from a previous marriage.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. 'Buyer's Guide' is flawed but valuable resource

By DBW While it is still several years before DVDs completely push "Buyer's Guide to Fifty Years of TV on Video" into obsolescence, it may be useful to note that the book, for all of its flaws, contains some extremely valuable information. Yes, the late Sam Frank hammers away relentlessly at the mistakes of other TV historians, then makes numerous errors of his own; and certainly his editorial comments often seem like unwarranted intrusions, even though the premise of an opinionated buyer's guide isn't inherently wrong (Leonard Maltin's annual Video Guide is clearly meant at least in part to be a consumer guide, to name one example; yet the Maltin guide is superior because it seems far less capricious). Nonetheless, there are things here that are difficult to find elsewhere. For example, it lists the episodes available from many of the series released by Columbia House Video Library through mid-1997 (and does so in chronological order, rather than the order of each volume). Even if you ask Columbia House for a list of every episode it offers of, say, "The Untouchables," you will get just a list of episodes, with no airdates, and no plot descriptions. Frank doesn't always give you plot descriptions, but generally he does, and with the airdates included, you can at least choose episodes from your favorite period of the show's development, if you're so inclined. Frank's guide is particularly good for anyone interested in television's so-called "Golden Age." He was a Baby Boomer, and takes a great interest in playing up -- and simultaneously debunking myths about -- what made this era special. It is here that his editorializing, particularly on things like picture and sound quality, is quite useful, as there are some horrible third-or later-generation public domain video dubs out there that should be avoided. The worst of these sometimes use kinescopes that are just overexposed or otherwise compromised to begin with. Yet, there are others that look and sound quite good, and it's good to have a reference point that helps to make the distinction. Listings are included for a lot of the "Playhouse 90," "Studio One," "Four Star Playhouse" and other early anthology shows released by Video Yesteryear and other public domain dealers, many of which are still available through retailers like Movies Unlimited. Inevitably there are listings for dealers in the book that no longer exist, or have since stopped selling videos, but in the age of the Web, a lot of this stuff can be found. The book also includes exhaustive appendixes about the history of videotape and the development of color television, which seem to be squarely aimed at TV historians. In fact, throughout "Buyer's Guide," Frank's extreme interest in both innovations is underscored again and again. His main point seems to be that old television shows that can now only be seen on somewhat blurry black and white kinescopes looked crisp and bright in their original telecasts, and for that reason, among others, we shouldn't automatically judge these shows, and the audiences who appreciated them, harshly today. Whenever Frank does find a tape of something shot on video before the late '60s that actually looks close to pristine, he makes sure to draw our attention to it. How relevant this is to the typical reader is open to conjecture. Numerous items from the MPI Home Video catalog are another welcome feature, including their "Nightline" tapes, "Hullabaloo," "The Missiles of October" and more. Frank's overview and descriptions of a number of episodes in the "Leonard Bernstein's Young People's Concerts" series are solid, and again represent something you don't see discussed very often today. "Buyer's Guide" is a good supplementary reference if you've already got Tim Brooks and Earle Marsh's "The Complete Directory to Primetime Network and Cable Television Programming: 1946 to Present," or Alex McNeil's "Total Television." Frank's myopia keeps it from being anything like the definitive tome he apparently envisioned, but it's hardly a disaster.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Full of Factual Errors and Baseless Opinions; Forget It

By A Customer After just a quick glance at this book, I quickly realized it cannot be counted on for reliable information. I was thumbing through this book today at a bookstore and was struck when I turned to the section on "I Love Lucy" and saw that Sam Frank had given this show only two out of I think five stars

When I saw that, I figured these ratings must pertain to something other than the quality of the show. So I turned to the key at the front of the book, and sure enough, he was rating the show's quality. I started reading his write-up about the show, which begins with an attempt to shatter a number of "myths" about the show (he claims, for example, that "I Love Lucy" wasn't the first hit sitcom; that it wasn't the first three-camera show; that Lucy's wasn't the first TV pregnancy; and a few other things). He then informs the readers that he can't stand the show. He writes that the theme of the show is about two women who scheme and connive, only to find out week after week that they've been "outsmarted" by their "superior" husbands. He writes that Ricky loved seeing Lucy cry; that when she tried to break into show business, she would concede by the end of the episode that Ricky was right -- that she didn't belong in show business (she did?!). He claimed that Carl Reiner created "The Dick Van Dyke Show" because he didn't like the premise of "I Love Lucy" and wanted to present a wife who was equal to her husband ("Oh, Rob!"). He writes that Reiner, Larry Gelbert (creator of "M\*A\*S\*H") and Tom Snyder all hate the show. Basically, all he did was trash the show. As I was reading these things, all I could think was, Has this guy ever really watched the show? How could he say something so inane as that it was a show about two husbands, Ricky and Fred, outsmarting their wives, Lucy and Ethel. The only thing this show was ever about was trying to make people laugh. The writers of this show weren't sitting around trying to conjure up ways for Ricky to outsmart Lucy to demonstrate he and Fred were "superior" to her and Ethel. All the writers ever tried to do on "I Love Lucy" was to figure out what would be the funniest way to end each episode. Sometimes that did mean having Ricky outsmart Lucy. Other times, it meant the reverse: Lucy outwitting Ricky. A number of episodes come immediately to mind in which Lucy winds up outsmarting Ricky: "The Gossip," "Equal Rights," "The Diet," "The Fur Coat," "The Benefit," "Lucy's Schedule," "The Saxophone," "Ricky Loses His Voice," and "Bull Fight Dance," just to name a few. But there are certainly many more. Most episodes, however, ended with neither trying to "outsmart" the other -- just some funny predicament. Incidentally, I'd just like to know Fred \*ever\* come across looking smarter than Ethel?! The impression I get about this writer is that he watched a couple episodes of the show, which end with Ricky coming out ahead of Lucy, and then decided that was the theme of the entire series. He obviously doesn't truly know this show at all. The way Frank describes "I Love Lucy" is that it's about a bullying husband forcing obedience out of his wife. He clearly fails to recognize that if this show was about anything, it was about the absolute opposite. This show is one of the earliest, and certainly most blatant, examples of a wife who chooses "not" give in to her husband's every demand, but has a will of her own and goes after all the things she wants, in spite of what her husband says. Sometimes, the show even finds Ricky turning to Lucy to help him out of a bind (if he thought he were the superior one, why would he turn to her for help?). On more than one occasion, Lucy was referred to as "the clever one." Besides his failure to pay close attention to this show, maybe Frank's comments are in part the result of years of watching moralistic sitcoms -- starting with the Normal Lear sitcoms of the 70s, through the Bloodworth-Thomason sitcoms of the '80s and '90s, and on to the present -- that were always meant to send some sort of a message. He somehow seems to think that "I Love Lucy," too, must be trying to send some message. He just can't accept that all "I Love Lucy" was ever about was making people laugh. There was no message to be given. Lucy Ricardo was not meant to represent every woman, she was only meant to be a single human being in the universe. And there was always a contrast on the show between Lucy and other female characters. In light of Frank's comments about Ricky's "bullying" nature, I thought it was interesting that he rated "The Honeymooners" something like four-and-a-half stars. I don't think there was ever an episode of that series where Ralph didn't threaten his wife with physical violence -- such as with a "one of these days, Alice, pow! right in the kisser" comment -- or tell her to her face that she was stupid. What's up with this double standard? Frank goes on to say that one of the main reasons Lucy's subsequent series were successful was that people tuned in to see the guest stars that appeared on the show. He is obviously unaware that, for the first three seasons of "The Lucy Show," there were hardly ever any guest stars on the show. And afterwards, guests only appeared about half the time. Besides, I can write a very long list of TV shows with big-name guests that were complete failures. Frank's descriptions of the formats of these Lucille Ball series, and some other information he provided about them, contain so many factual errors, I could write pages. Most of these errors are the same ones I've seen written time and again by other TV "experts" (these TV book writers seem to constantly copy one another's material, including the factual errors), which leads me to conclude that what Frank "knows" about these shows is not based on a personal analysis or knowledge of them, but only on things he's read about them. As a result, as far as I'm concerned, his opinions carry very little weight. How can one accept someone's review of a TV show when that person hasn't even watched (or at least hasn't paid much attention to) the show they're reviewing? Based on what I saw in this book, I have little confidence that there it is reliable factually, or that there is any substance to Mr. Frank's opinions, with respect to any of the shows he discusses. So my rating for Frank's book: a big thumbs down. If you want an unbiased and reliable source on television shows (although not specifically about television shows on video), try Tim Brooks and Earle Marsh's "The Complete Directory to Prime Time and Network TV Show," or Alex McNeil's "Total Television."

This TV treasure trove is packed with information on all available sitcoms, drama series and anthologies, science fiction, westerns, children's shows, variety shows, specials, documentaries, and much more--over 50,000 shows, from

1948 to the present.

From Library Journal Want to buy episodes of 77 Sunset Strip but can't find them at the local video store? This massive, consumer-oriented guide by a former staff writer for Daily Variety will provide you with a telephone or mail order source not only for this series but for a wide range of TV programs, from daytime game shows and prime-time sitcoms to specials and TV movies. This book covers some of the same territory as Tim Brooks and Earl Marsh's *The Complete Directory to Prime Time Network and Cable TV Shows* (Ballantine, 1995), and there is also considerable overlap with *Video Source Book* (Gale, 1998), which is not, however, a consumer title. The volume includes much material beyond the essentials necessary for a buying guide, making it difficult to locate information that should be the core of the book. The coding of video vendors within listings is not highlighted, requiring patience and much page turning to locate the code and convert it into a purchase source. All the extras would have made a good companion volume. Still, this includes good tidbits for television trivia freaks and patient buyers of television programs. Kathy Breeden, Univ. of Tennessee at Chattanooga Lib. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. "...enormously useful as a resource for finding out if a TV show is available on videotape." -- Seattle Post-Intelligencer, November 26, 1999