

Oh my goodness! Martin and Gina are on the rocks

Martin

Martin Lawrence, Tisha Campbell, Garrett Morris

Thursday, 8:30 p.m.
WFLX Fox 22

Tonight Martin Lawrence and his Philly brood are engaging in a battle — a battle of the sexes that promises to be as exciting as the latest Holyfield/Bowe skirmish.

In a three-part story arc that began last Thursday, Martin and his beloved Gina parted ways. But unlike the clean break between *Cheers*' Lilith and Frazier, Martin and Gina ended their relationship with a war of words that more closely resembled a knock-down-drag-out fight.

So, what's the fate of Mr. "What up!" and his gorgeous gal pal? Well, it's your call. Literally. In an unprecedented move, the producers of *Martin* are allowing viewers to decide which heartbroken lover will be the first to crawl back to the other. For 75 cents, you can play Cupid and cast your vote via a special 900 number. All proceeds will be given to charity.

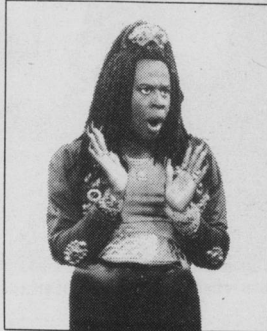
But enough about *Martin*'s story lines

television

ROB BRITTAIN

and this week's slightly distorted version of interactive TV. To be honest, I don't watch *Martin* because of its plots or its scripts — I watch because of its characters.

Like it or not, by Thursday night my grey cells automatically shift into neutral. And the only known remedy for such academic stupor is laughter ...



Hold-a you close, keep-a you warm

especially Martin-esque laughter.

A black, male '90s reincarnation of Carol Burnett, Martin Lawrence brings me to tears with his wild and wacky portrayal of his next-door neighbor, Sheneneh. But why do I love Sheneneh? Well, maybe it's because Sheneneh is the world's biggest underdog.

Coupled with a speech impediment and the figure of three or four women heinously intertwined, poor Sheneneh doesn't have a lot going for her. And after being beaten down by society, she's developed a facade of toughness. Oftentimes, maintaining this facade brings her face-to-face with conflict. And much like *Designing Women*'s Bernice Clifton, Sheneneh responds with trademark belligerence (i.e. "I'm gonna beat your ass!").

Reminiscent of *Sanford & Son* brawls between Fred and Ester, Sheneneh often tries to hammer Martin's beloved Gina when they meet in the hallway. Yet Sheneneh also has a lighter side — a side that was highlighted in the unforgettable episode where she won a date with Kid 'n' Play's Christopher Reid. Besides her usual one-liners ("You so crazy!" and "Oh my goodness!"), she performed a hysterical rendition of "Forever Sheneneh," her favorite song. And compared to Sheneneh's singing, the sound of fingernails skidding down a chalkboard seems harmonious.

Yet Martin Lawrence doesn't pro-



To split or not to split? You be the judge



tagonist just Sheneneh and himself, he also assumes the roles of his mother and little Willy, the snotty nosed child who's always knocking on Gina's door and hassling her with his latest get-rich-quick scheme.

Unlike *Family Matters*, however, where charismatic nerd Steve Urkel overran the Winslow family and became the dominant feature of the show, Martin is keeping the lid on alter egos such as Sheneneh and little Willy in hopes of keeping them fresh and entertaining.

According to the Nielsens, Martin's

strategy seems to be working. But if you're an establishment rebel who discounts Nielsen rating credibility, just listen to the Friday morning buzz across campus and the surrounding community. Everybody's talking about *Martin* ... on the bus, in line at Union Station and while window shopping along Franklin Street.

So, why not join the growing ranks of *Martin* fans, perfect your Sheneneh imitation and tune in this promising young comic's latest feast of follies! Just a word of warning, like Krispy Kreme doughnuts, *Martin* is addictive.

TV couple to enjoy more than hot, steamy coffee

Just in time for your Valentine reading pleasure, a novel based on TV. Well, sort of. A novel based on TV commercials.

Sounds sort of like the stepchild of the book-gone-mini series craze, doesn't it?

Love Over Gold will hit the stands for a mere \$5.75. It's not a behind-the-scenes look at America's favorite soaps — it's the compilation of those cheesy Taster's Choice coffee commercials. You know, the ones where the guy's always going over to borrow a cup of sugar or something from his saucy next-door neighbor and they always end up talking about coffee?

You know you've seen these before. Recall the one where the guy's going away and he calls his neighbor, like, to ask for some Taster's Choice for the road or something and she says, "Paris ... how romantic." And he says, "It could be." Or the one where he thinks she's seeing someone else because she was drinking coffee with a strange man, then she reveals it was only her brother.

Maybe it sells coffee, but can it sell books?

"It's a good read," author Susan Moody told the Associated Press. "It's all done in extremely good taste. There's nothing particularly explicit about it."

Thank goodness. Nothing worse than a scandalous coffee book.

Apparently, the commercials are

tv news

JENNIFER BRETT

enjoying a sort of cult following in Britain, where the coffee is called Nescafe Golden Blend, instead of Taster's Choice. In fact, only the Charles and Diana saga is more popular among the grocery store tabloid crowd. When Mr. Nescafe said the "L" word in December, the news splashed onto the front page of *The Sun*, Britain's biggest-selling tabloid.

(Poor Brits. At least we have the National Enquirer to tell us the daily updated dimensions of Delta Burke.) Corgi Books, which has printed 150,000 copies already, bills *Love Over Gold* as "the untold story of TV's greatest romance" on the front cover.

That's not all. Nestle and its advertising agency, McCann-Erickson, who own the steamy cafe characters, are already talking about film rights. When you pick up a copy, in fact, you'll find an order blank for a video of all the commercials inside. Just in case you missed a day of TV.

The book, obviously, is a little more inclusive than the commercials, which leave a lot to the imagination. Moody, who used the name Susannah Jones for the book (perhaps a little embarrassed at writing a novel from a series of commercials to use her own?), said she supplied both characters with murky pasts and broken hearts. Of course.

A little excerpt, from page 80: (They meet in London, he's drunk, she's out of coffee — of course — and she knocks at his door.

"Almost automatically she walked towards his kitchen, conscious of his gaze on

her back, her somewhat naked back, glad, without knowing quite why, that she was looking particularly glamorous that evening. He opened a cupboard, took out her favorite brand of coffee, and said, 'I hope this isn't too sophisticated for your guests.'"

No word yet on the book's sales or even predictions whether people are going to want to lap up page after page of the coy cafe romance that characterizes the commercials. A snippet in between TV shows is one thing, but a

whole book is another.

But Taster's Choice's British sister reports that Gold Blend sales are up 40 percent since the launch of the commercial series, although the book's effects are still nebulous. The author apparently doesn't care — she's got hers.

"I was asked if I would like a certain sum of money for what they said at the time was six weeks' work," Moody said. "said, 'Who do I have to sleep with?' I just write because somebody pays me for doing what I like doing best."

Classy chick. Moody's not writing for mankind but for money, she said. And what better reason is there?

nielsen ratings

1. (1) **60 Minutes**, CBS
23.2 rating, 21.6 million homes
2. (4) **Home Improvement**, ABC
21.4, 19.9 million homes
3. (14) **20/20**, ABC
20.0, 18.6 million homes
4. (X) **Hallmark Special: Skylark**, CBS Sunday Movie
19.9, 18.5 million homes
5. (3) **Murphy Brown**, CBS
19.8, 18.4 million homes
6. (2) **Roseanne**, ABC
19.2, 17.6 million homes
7. (X) **Laugh In 25th Anniversary**, NBC, 18.7, 17.4 million homes
8. (5) **Coach**, ABC
18.4, 17.1 million homes
9. (9) **Cheers**, NBC
18.3, 17.0 million homes
10. **Seinfeld**, NBC
17.9, 16.7 million homes

Listings include the week's ranking, with full season-to-date ranking in parentheses, rating for the week, and total homes. An "X" in parentheses denotes one-time-only presentation. A rating measures the percentage of the nation's 90.4 million TV homes.

Omnibus

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ratings

- — miss it
- — watch it and rag on it
- — use it as a study break
- — watch it religiously
- — tap it