

'Who shot J.R.?'

Students swept up in 'Dallas' syndrome

By BEVERLY SHEPARD
Staff Writer

Around 10 tonight, thousands of UNC students are expected to be part of 250 million television viewers worldwide who will gather to witness what has become an international phenomenon. No, it's not the latest satellite pictures from Saturn...it's the long-awaited conclusion to the question "Who Shot J.R. Ewing?"

Clearly, CBS' "Dallas," in its third season, is destined to become one of the most popular soap operas of all time. The evening show, focused on the perils and conflicts of a wealthy Texas oil family (The Ewings) has had a snowball effect on the American public—especially college students. And now that the main character—J.R.—has been shot, interest in "Dallas" has skyrocketed.

Sheri Ford, a junior from Henderson, offers evidence. "I love 'Dallas.' I don't miss it unless it is absolutely necessary," she said.

Even before the first episode of the "whodunit" series aired Nov. 7, many viewers had already identified the culprit who shot J.R.

Katie Brown, a sophomore from Durham, said, "It was probably his wife (Sue Ellen). The gun had her fingerprints on it, but then there's an outside chance somebody else did it."

Inez Horton, a sophomore from Wilmington, said, "Kristin did it because she told Sue Ellen that she came to her apartment drunk and waving a gun. She tried to take the guilt away from herself. Why else would she (say that) if she (Kristin) weren't guilty?"

Debbie Tomlinson, a senior from Goldsboro, had someone else in mind. "I would have loved it to have been (Dusty), because he supposedly has more money than J.R. and has enough to buy people off. I think it would be (Pam). She seems more likely than any of the rest because she seems to be kind—either that or Miss Ellie."

And Amy Whitley, a senior from Wendell, is pointing the finger at banker Vaughn Leland, "because J.R. swindled him out of some money."

Even Ford had her own ideas about who attempted J.R.'s assassination.

"I think the two men that held the Ewing women hostage did it," she said.

Yet as all the speculations about who shot J.R. come into the open, some viewers just give up on trying to identify the gunman. Rod Barbee, a sophomore from Durham, said sarcastically, "He probably shot himself—that would be the ultimate."

But not all students are caught up in the "Dallas" syndrome. Some say they don't give a darn who shot J.R. Laurie Medley, a sophomore from Denver, N.C., who is not a "Dallas" fan, said, "It's silly how big a deal they're making it."

Geoffrey Kokiko, a sophomore from Goldsboro, said, "If I had plans, I wouldn't cancel anything to watch J.R."

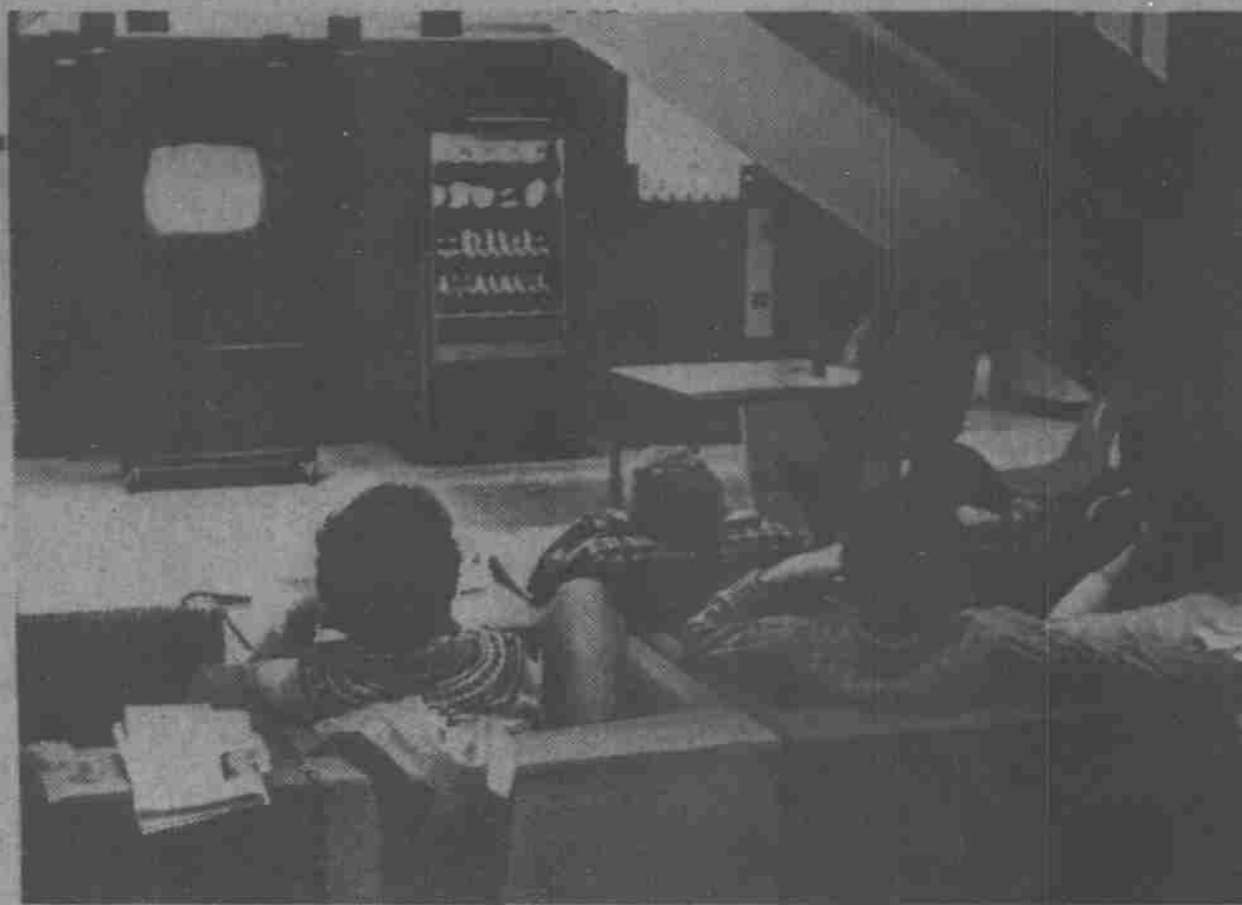
Brown has a point. The J.R.-Dallas syndrome has prompted bumper stickers, posters, records, Stetson hats, the NBC daytime soap "Texas," beer and bogus certificates for Ewing land, cattle and oil. Even fake \$100 bills that read "In Hagman We Trust" have been printed, not to mention T-shirts, a doll and a soon-to-be-released comic strip.

Danny Norris, manager of the Shirt Closet at Southsquare Mall in Durham, said he expected the sale of the store's J.R. T-shirts to increase, now that the new season has begun.

The store's T-shirt captions include "I Shot J.R.," "Who Shot J.R.?" "Wanted: Dead or Alive for the Shooting of J.R." and "J.R. for President." And there's another shirt with J.R.'s picture on it.

Despite CBS' announcement that J.R.'s assassin will be revealed tonight, at least one student is not so easily convinced.

"They're doing a good job of making it very suspenseful, Wendell senior Whitley said. "They're going to pull it out for at least four or five episodes. They've got a good thing—why spoil it?"



DTH/Scott Sharpe

A popular way for UNC students to pass the time as well as to forget the pressures of college life seems to be watching soap operas. Dozens gather daily in the Union to find out who's doing what, where, how and with whom.

Soap operas captivate Union audience

By KIMBERLY KLEMAN
Staff Writer

Sharon's managed to grab herself a chair in the Carolina Union lounge this afternoon. No small feat. With books on one knee and lunch on the other, she tries to look inconspicuous as she opens her canned drink and fumbles with the cellophane wrapper of the cracker package.

The girl sitting next to her breaks her television stare just long enough to throw Sharon an angry glance. "Shhhh!" the girl hisses.

Sharon proceeds to sip on her drink and nibble without realizing what she's doing; like all the afternoon regulars in the lounge, her eyes are glued to the television.

Midway in its path from the cracker package to her mouth, her hand stops. Her eyes widen and her face goes blank; her favorite soap opera

character announces he is divorcing his wife.

Though this scene might appear far-fetched, UNC soap opera devotees will attest to its truth.

"Last year when I came to the lounge to watch them (soap operas) the atmosphere was like Hush! Don't you dare touch that television," says junior Annette Woods.

Freshman Scott McGregor describes an incident this year. "About three weeks ago when a lot of action occurred on 'General Hospital,' at least 150 people were watching it at the Union. Everyone in the lounge was screaming and cheering," he says.

But, the effect of soap operas is not merely one of captivation.

"Soap operas are addictive," says freshman Robin Newton. "They're habit-forming."

Freshman Tina Bargeman, who says she watches soap operas 15 hours a

week, adds, "If I had a choice of going somewhere and knew that my soap opera was on, I would stay home."

Freshman Willie Little likes the characters. "I learn about different types of people—some I'm not exposed to every day, like doctors and lawyers," he says.

Junior Marie Baumeister, a regular viewer of ABC-TV's "All My Children," says, "I'd call the characters slightly exaggerated but real."

But, Annette Woods summed up students' attraction to soaps best: "Soap opera characters are caught; they're victims. These characters and college students are both under pressure. It's a continuous struggle...You think you're up one minute...but you're just chipping at a large redwood tree."

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Alliman has just completed a five-week inspection of CWS projects in Cambodia. He will present slides of these and other Asian projects with his reports from 7-9 p.m. Friday and 8-10 a.m. Saturday. There will be no admission charge.

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