

Temple, adorned with its odd combination of red, green, white and flowered tiles plus four rearing metal lions, or are they dragons? Here people clustered around an inner square made of benches. In the center, on top of a pyramid of food surrounded by pompons of marigolds, was a fish with an egg in his open mouth. Everyone was throwing money into a pot before him and then anointing their forehead and sometimes their hair part with the red powder that had been set out for that purpose. As is often true for me in Kathmandu, I had no idea what this minifestival was about, and I never did find out.

jostled and honked at. Rickshaws with scenes painted on the backs of their buggies practically push you into shops while they tinkle their bells furiously. They in turn are harried by motorcycles with clamorous horns. Cars crawl along trying not to crush either pedestrians or rickshaws while the mad *betchaks*, three-wheeled vehicles, weave in and out among it all, spouting black fumes that cause women to pull their saris across their noses and Westerners to mutter about global warming. Simultaneously you are being impertuned to change money, buy carpets, Tiger Balm, saris. No wonder travelers look as

far right he is eating from a pot, one hopes, a vegetable stew. In the center of the court, around which the children chase each other, is a little shrine hung with laundry.

As the sun went down I knew I had reached the Tamil section because men, drifting by like dandelion down, whispered as they passed, "Heroin, opium, hashish, marijuana." They apparently hawk their wares indiscriminately, since I am, to anyone of a noticing sort, blatantly a non-prospect.

Ms. Swenson is a poet in Brooklyn, N.Y., who travels frequently in Asia.



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H O T E L S

TV: Talk-Show Wars; Alien Abductors; Blacklisted Actors

2/22/98 W37 Street
Saturday, Feb. 24
The Late Shift

This film on the late-night talk-show wars (adapted from Bill Carter's book) concerns the battles for succession that began with Johnny Carson's retirement as host of "The Tonight Show." The producers have wrung an unlikely amount of energy out of the dry stuff of contracts and clauses and come up with a snappily entertaining film—if one also dragged down by its crudity. Certain of the principals depicted here may be tempted to think of lawsuits—not including David Letterman (John Michael Higgins), portrayed, and deftly, as an honorable, upright, sensitive, foursquare hero who has dreamed all his life of hosting "The Tonight Show." His competitor is Jay Leno (Daniel Roebuck), presented here as a kindly semi-idiot drooling his lines through prognathous jaws. Kathy Bates is Leno's famously aggressive agent, Helen Kushnick, a murderous portrait unencumbered by subtleties. The film ends on a note of triumph for Mr. Letterman, who goes off to CBS and a long string (now ended) of ratings victories over Mr. Leno.

☞ 8-9:30 p.m. EST on HBO.

Sunday, Feb. 25
Gone in the Night

A seven-year-old girl is abducted in the middle of the night and found, days later, murdered. This fact-based miniseries follows the trials of the victim's parents, shortly thereafter accused of murdering the child—and a richly instructive four

hours these are, too, in their revelations of the way in which police, prosecutors and similarly interested politicians set about trying to win a conviction. Chicago state attorney Richard M. Daley led the charge in this notorious 1988 case, which in due course saw the accused couple, Cyndi and David Dowaliby (Shannon Doherty and Kevin Dillon) arrested for murder. Between the Clouseau-like investigators and the determined prosecutors, a case was soon built from evidence of a supremely dubious kind. Abetted by sturdy performances—particularly Dixie Carter's as Mr. Dowaliby's mother—this production is not the standard made-for-TV melodrama, mawkish though it can sometimes be. An unusually detailed and hard-eyed look at a wrongful prosecution, the role of lawyers, the press—it is, all told, a searing story.

☞ 9-11 p.m. EST on CBS. Part two airs the following Tuesday.

Tuesday, Feb. 27
Kidnapped by UFO's?

"Nova" looks into the fantasies of alleged abductees now finding a wide audience for their stories of victimization by rampaging aliens. The film begins, seductively enough, with respectfully reported introductions to the principals trafficking in these hallucinations—people like the graphic artist John, whose busy abductors took semen from his genitals and also, we learn, removed John's eye. Here, too, is the self-styled therapist Budd Hopkins, who has made a bundle flogging books of gibberish about alien visitors and their

victims. We meet, not least, Harvard University psychiatrist John Mack, now famous for his efforts to advance the cause of irrationality in our times. Dr. Mack, who gives credence to the alien-encounter experience, will likely not be pleased with this film, which proceeds to demolish the claims of the various hucksters, charlatans, assorted exhibitionists and garden-variety nitwits immersed in humbug about alien abductors—and does so with quietly killing authority. On hand to help out are Carl Sagan, sociologist Richard Ofshe, memory expert Elizabeth Loftus and psychologist Robert Baker—dead shots, all.

☞ 8-9 p.m. EST on PBS. PBS air dates and times vary, so check local listings.

Tuesday, Feb. 27
Blacklist: Hollywood on Trial

This documentary on the communist blacklist covers a good deal of ground in 90 minutes, most of it entirely compelling. Even the parts steeped in mendacity and delusion are compelling in their grim way—not least the part depicting the Communists as the only ones in the country prepared to fight Nazism. Someone should have told the filmmakers about the Nazi-Soviet pact, which (while it lasted) turned America's obedient Communist Party into fervent opponents of war against Hitler. That said, the film is a potent re-creation of a dark era. As its cast of famous blacklist veterans makes clear, the scars of that era are not the sort that heal.

☞ 10-11:30 p.m. EST on AMC.
—Dorothy Rabinowitz