



FAMILY AT WAR: The Ewings are hewing at each other's dastardly schemes with the same gusto as the original *Dallas* characters showed in 1978.

Dallas' daggers drawn again

IT'S EITHER inspired, or foolish, to try to resurrect the iconic soap opera that was *Dallas*. Yes, you can cosy up to the surviving fans of the original series, which ran from 1978 to 1991, but you're also opening yourself up to lashings of unfavourable comparisons. You'll never please everyone.

But US cable channel TNT took the risk, and it paid off. A ratings hit in the US, *Dallas* now airs in 36 countries, or 37 if you count New Zealand, where it premieres on TV One this Friday.

It isn't a remake, it's a sequel. Imagine 20 years have elapsed since we left oil-baron brothers Bobby and JR Ewing with JR firing a shot, possibly to commit suicide, and Bobby yelling, "Oh my God!". Now imagine that the subsequent TV movies, including *Dallas: JR Returns*, which revealed that JR fired at the mirror, not himself, and has since quit drinking, never happened.

It would be hard to accept any other actor as JR so, thankfully, Larry Hagman reprises the role (sadly, he died in November, partway through taping season two). Patrick Duffy returns as the nicer brother, Bobby, and JR's ex-wife Sue Ellen is again played by Linda Gray of the frozen face and *Beverly Hills, 90210* spin-offs.

Others returning are the Ewings' half-brother,



TV preview
**Sarah
Lang**

Ray (Steve Kanaly), their niece, Lucy (Charlene Tilton) and rival Cliff (Ken Kercheval).

For many others in the cast, this is a *Desperate Housewives* reunion. If Bobby's new wife, Ann, looks familiar, that's because Brenda Strong played *Housewives*' narrator Mary Alice. Jesse Metcalfe, who played Gabrielle's toy-boy gardener, trades up to the leading role of Bobby's son, Christopher, and the equally spunky Josh Henderson (who played Edie's nephew, Austin) stars as JR's son, John Ross.

The series opens with John Ross secretly drilling for and striking oil on family ranch Southfork. Bobby is livid. Drilling clashes with his promise to his late mother, his plans for Southfork and Christopher's plans to make Ewing Alternative Energies the next Exxon. Enter JR, who is alive, if not well, to join John Ross in an epic tug-of-war between two dad-and-son teams.

It is tempting to pigeonhole Bobby and Christopher as the goodies and JR and John Ross as the baddies, but this is more a clash of the old ways (oil) with the new ways (alternative energy).

However, such contemporary issues know their place — in the background. Melodrama takes centre stage. The first episode alone serves up blackmail, a death sentence, a home invasion, a punch-up, a set-up, a wedding, and a love square between John Ross, his girlfriend, Elena (Jordana Brewster), Christopher and his bride, Rebecca (Julie Gonzalo).

Dallas should appeal to 20- and 30-somethings who were watching *Fraggle Rock* in the 1980s and who need their soap-opera fix while *Shortland Street* is awol.

But there's plenty here for nostalgia-seekers, and not just the title sequence with its once-cool split-screen shots of town and country and its fonts straight out of 80s' staple *The Lettering Book*.

The new *Dallas* follows the old *Dallas*' tried-and-true recipe for soap opera and respects its traditions, updating it to the 21st century. The conflicts and cliff-hangers, schemes and scandals, rivalries and ruses remain, just without the big hair and shoulder pads.

Dallas premieres on TV One, Friday at 8.30pm.

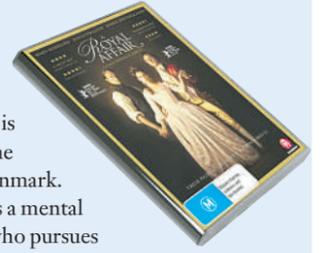
DVDs

A ROYAL AFFAIR

★★★★☆

Out Boxing Day

It's the 18th century and something is rotten in the state of Denmark. The king is a mental defective who pursues pleasure over policy, alternately ignoring and humiliating his English consort. But Queen Caroline Mathilde (Alicia Vikander) finds a political ally and passion in the form of the court's free-thinking German physician Struensee (Mads Mikkelsen), with fateful outcomes for them and the nation. Both a lavish fact-based romantic drama and a fascinating insight into political upheaval in Europe, this is a must-see for arthouse fans.



SEEKING A FRIEND FOR THE END OF THE WORLD

★★☆☆☆

Out now

A strange beast of a film, in which a 70-mile wide asteroid field is on a collision course with Earth and people have only a month to prepare for End Times. Some opt for suicide, others for sex, drugs and rock'n'roll. Steve Carell and Keira Knightley play lonely strangers who hook up on a road trip to pursue final agendas. Unlike the terrific 1998 cult hit *Last Night*, which wondered what lonely folk might do with their final hours (and didn't shy away from the possibility of getting them wrong) this bittersweet comedy-drama shifts wildly in tone, and no matter how much you like the leads and their offbeat adventures, the chemistry is all wrong.



Ann Newbery

Update

To sink or to swim — their fate awaits

Start spreading the news about a fresh batch of potential A-listers. By Sarah Hughes.

IT WAS the ultimate guilty pleasure. A frothy soufflé about the lives and loves of privileged teens on Manhattan's Upper East Side, which you knew you shouldn't watch but somehow never could quite switch off. Sadly, all teen dramas, even those hailed (only half-jokingly) by *New York Magazine* as "The greatest show of our time", come to an end, and thus this week, the US saw the final episode of *Gossip Girl* after six seasons of betrayal, brooding and bitchiness. (TVNZ will screen the last season next year.)

Gossip Girl's demise is no surprise. The show has fallen a long way from its glory days, when a combination of acerbic wit and high fashion made its young cast the toast of New York. In part, that's due to the graduation curse: all teen shows fall apart once the characters move from high school towards adulthood, although it didn't help that the writers seemed determined to pile twist upon twist even as the dialogue slipped from

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knowingly sending up soap operas to simply sounding like a bad example of the genre.

Post-*Gossip Girl* jostling has begun as the cast wait to discover who will be their generation's Michelle Williams (from *Dawson's Creek* to Oscar bait) and who'll pull the Ian Ziering short straw and end up as the answer to a trivia question in a midweek pub quiz (Steve Sanders in *Beverly Hills 90210*, if you're wondering).

The frontrunner is Blake Lively (Serena) thanks to a string of fashion endorsements, prominent parts in darker fare such as *The Town* and *Savages* and a high-profile marriage to Hollywood beefcake Ryan Reynolds. Leighton

Meester (Blair) has yet to match that level of success, but an eye-catching turn in the Hugh Laurie comedy *The Oranges* could change things. As for Taylor Momsen (Jenny), the child star-turned-rock singer, she recently made headlines via a one-minute video clip featuring her naked reciting her latest lyrics.

Of the boys, Penn Badgley, who played the sensitive Dan, has chosen the James Van Der Beek path of indie redemption and will next be seen playing troubled singer Jeff Buckley; the likeable Chace Crawford (Nate) popped up as eye candy in a couple of rom-coms; and British actor Ed Westwick (Chuck) gets another chance to smoulder-with-menace as Tybalt in the latest *Romeo and Juliet*.

Who knows if any of them will make the transition from teen star to serious contender, but as *Gossip Girl*'s famous sign-off almost had it: "You know you loved them. XOXO."

The Independent



HOPE FLOATS: The core cast of done and dusted *Gossip Girl* must each find roles to suit their level of talent, watchability and career longevity.