TRAVEL

"I bet you don't recognize me, do you? I'm George Angus - or at least I was." The man arises from the operating table — a scar slashed across his forehead. "I'm going to tell you all about it..." and the credits start to roll for a neat, low-key half-hour.

George is a hardened bank-robber, and every cop is looking for him. His wimpy henchman, Frank, arranges for a secret operation. It's a dark night for the cottage rendezvous, a man with a lamp opens the door, and there are strange noises in the woods.

At an exploratory consultation, the suitor drags out the foot demands a fee of $50,000 and that a transplant donor be provided. Poor squawkish Frank then gets some rudimentary training in order to assist the dotty doctor with his strange experiment.

The success of the bizarre operation turns to ashes, due to unforeseen medical complications relating to the new body acquired by George. Transplant is obviously made for TV, and its economical style is patterned on Hitchcock and The Twilight Zone. Creepy moments, hints of black magic, and medical man (54 years with a limp that has twisted his mind...) work well, but this is surely not a first in Canadian film history. The wimpy henchman (Frank) is played most convincingly by Eugene Amodeo, the vice-president & general manager of Universal Films (Canada)!

This little treat receives its theatrical premiere at the Fourth Annual Vancouver International Film Festival on June 5, 1985.

S CAN L I N E S

Games people play

by Joyce Nelson

and respectful, emitting proper applause according to cue. The voices of hosts, panelists, and participants remain calm - even somewhat flat - with never a whoop or groan, unless it be a sympathetic sound uttered by host Jim Perry on Definition. On the American game-shows, bells, buzzers and everything but whoopie-cushions accompany the goings-on, while the Canadian hosts whip up the suspense and the contestants and audience alike shriek and wail in the agony or ecstasy of the moment.

Of course, this emotional tone has something to do with the nature of the prizes at stake. Big bucks and big-ticket items characterize the American game-shows, while on Definition a prize-winner is going for something like an electric back-massager, a watch, or a water filter. And on Front Page Challenge there simply are no prizes: panelists Pierre Berton, Fred Davis, Betty Kennedy, and Allan Fotheringham are clearly beyond such indignities.

All these aspects relate to the nature of the games being played, which are also decidedly different in the two cultures. Front Page Challenge, Canada's oldest TV show still-running, is really an educational program thinly disguised as a game. Its focus is clearly informative, with its panelists revealing their historical current affairs acumen by guessing the front-page issue connected to a hidden challenger. Actually, it's all an excuse for educating the viewer, who is not only let on the identity of the challenger, but also given a little mini-documentary on the subject once the panelists have guessed the item. If that weren't enough, the panelists then add to the lesson by interviewing the challenger. Thereby, raising the finer points about the particular event. Fortunately, there is no quiz to test whether or not we have retained the material.

Similarly, CTV's Definition has a slightly serious and purposeful tone, depending on word-skill and familiarity with puns in its variation on the old game of Hangman. In both Canadian shows there is an underlying belief in the value of words, logic, and mental skills. On Definition, viewers themselves are invited to submit the items of word-play, and are given no more clues than the contestants. In both shows, a certain amount of skill is assumed.

American game-shows, however, long ago abandoned any pretense of intelligence. No doubt as a result of the quiz-show scandal of the '50s, American game-shows instead focus on luck. Participants generally match their luck against the random play of a machine - the 'Tic Tac Dough' board, the 'Bulls-Eye', the "Wheel of Fortune", the 'Family Feud' board, etc. If Canadian game-shows suggest a belief in human mental prowess, U.S. shows convey the sense of technology reigning supreme, and even that human effort and skill are largely irrelevant. All a contestant need do is push a button, make a decision to activate the machine, and the manufacturer promises the winning, and the American Dream may/may not come true. Luck is, for all purposes, the decisive factor.

If game-shows differ so distinctly in the two cultures, perhaps one can relate them to the very different values promised the two peoples in their ruling constitutions. This may sound far fetched, but only consider for a moment that the retributed BNA Act promises"peace, order, and good government," while the U.S. Constitution endorses "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." That difference is enough to send me back to the tube for another round. 

RED ROCKET

A tiny perfect look at Toronto's streetcars. The manufacturers called them "streamliners," to some they were PCCs of North America, to others a film with an elaborate story line, artfully put together. The Rocket, however, had a simple, straightforward story with a strong emotional appeal.

The camera slides over abandoned streetcars, capturing the mood of the city. There's some lovely old footage from the Toronto Transit Commission's files with ghostly historic voices over the images. The audience is encouraged to put together the fragments of cinematic sparks, finally brings the sad realization that, like most things dearly loved, the streetcar is slowly passing away.

An affectionate and well-wrought tribute to the Red Rockets, put together with style and professionalism by a filmmaker with a number of TV credits.

Front Page Challenge, CBC-TV's, has purchased this little film some may happen upon it during spring or summer.