

Chapter 5

Stunts: Falling for CBS

Introduction

A typical scene in a 1960s action-adventure television series: The starring actor, resourceful and debonair, attempts to cleverly elude an angry mob. Suddenly, our hero discovers he is cornered on an isolated rooftop and is edged closer and closer to imminent doom, as the mob scowls, growls and closes in on him. His only chance for escape is to jump from the top of the three-story building into a large haystack conveniently situated below. He perches himself, braces his stance and, just before he jumps, a commanding voice echoes from the blackness: “CUT!” The director signals the stunt double to take his place as the star casually walks away.



In “Spanish Curse” Jim and Artie team up to toss away their troubles.

Webster defines the word *stunt* as a notable feat of strength, skill or daring, especially when done as part of a challenge or as part of an entertainment. Definitely a challenge and invariably entertaining, a stuntman is hired to risk life and limb to make a star appear brave, daring, infallible and sometimes, indestructible. The television hero’s image is at stake so the transition must be inconspicuous.

For a majority of principals — starring actors — this occurred several times during the daily shooting schedule as a mandatory practice, since a star performing his own stunts was risking much more than self-injury. Losing the main character of a show to injury and lengthy recuperation meant, at best, production would shut down and the company would lose thousands of dollars a day; at worst, the future of the series would be at stake.



Jim tackles a trio of henchmen: Fred Stromsoe, Whitey Hughes and Bob Herron.

There were a remaining few, however, a minute percentage of daring actors who knew no fear and loved the thrill of every stunt performed or attempted. One of the select few starring actors who fit this category was Robert Conrad, AKA James T. West.



From “TNOT Vipers”