

On the cover

By HANK GALLO

In 1965, the city's lights went out. Twelve years later, in 1977, it happened again. Using that gauge, we shouldn't be subjected to another blackout until 1989. Alas, television has decided it should come nine years early.

New York has survived the two last major blackouts with a minimum of scars. Hopefully, we'll be able to weather tonight's story of a darkened metropolis, "The Night the City Screamed" (Channel 7, 9 p.m.), with as much good fortune.

Moviemakers love creating disaster films. Irwin Allen, for one, has made a career out of it. Airplanes, skyscrapers, ocean liners, bees, earthquakes, and tidal waves have all been treated in such movies. The locations may be different, but some things never change. No matter what, no matter where and no matter why, they all have one thing in common—there is always a host of characters played by a flock of *names*. "The Night the City Screamed" is no different.

David Cassidy (last remembered for his poignant performances in "Man Undercover," a police series that lasted just about as long as this movie) stars in this made-for-TV epic as, you guessed it, a police officer. His partner is played by Clifton Davis, TV's "That's My Mama" star and the songwriter who wrote "Never Can Say Goodbye." Perhaps the producers should have gotten the author of Donna Summer's "Dim All the Lights." It would have been much more appropriate.

Enough of that, let's talk disaster. These two green cops who have never been in a test situation before have to keep a tough neighborhood under control. They are quarterbacked by "Dandy" Don Merideth, who plays their boss, the police captain.

Raymond Burr stepped out of his wheelchair to co-star as the mayor of this beleaguered town. The man doesn't get a break. If you think Nixon had problems, wait until this guy's story is told. Here he is, the mayor of a big time city in the midst of a blackout. Trouble enough, right? Wrong.

Besides the hassles of the initial crisis, Burr has a councilman (played by Robert Culp) hot on his tail. Culp, you see, is trying to discredit the mayor in order to advance his own career. With all this, no wonder Perry Mason went gray.



Woman behind bars: Linda Purl is actually safer locked up than she would be free when the looters attack in tonight's ABC TV movie, "The Night the City Screamed."

Culp's aide is played by Shelley Smith (star of the late series "The Associates"). Shelley falls out of like with her boss when she discovers he's just a manipulating son of a Republican. Who ever said beautiful blondes weren't smart?

Like a grounded "Airport," this movie has a romantic struggle also. A young couple is having trouble with their marriage. Linda Purl and Gary Frank (a man with a lot of "Family" problems) help their union when her father (Vic Tayback) enlists their aid in protecting his appliance store.

With shows like this coming on, one wonders why looters still go for the color portables.

Movies of this genre may serve no purpose other than to make us remember—the sound of cars careening through dark intersections, bricks shattering storefront windows, people trapped for hours in subway cars and elevators, and others who died in hospitals because their artificial life support systems had broken down.

I, however, would rather recall playing monopoly by candlelight and eating all the ice cream before it melted.