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Playhouse 90 Gets Under Way With Story About Red Spies, Sneak Attack

Written by Jack Gould

Playhouse 90, the new hour and a half series to be presented on a regular basis over Channel 2, did not have a very auspicious debut last night. It presented a war drama that ran the gamut of hokum.

The opening vehicle was called Forbidden Area; it was Rod Serling's dramatization of a novel by Pat Frank. This viewer cannot speak about the novel, but Mr. Serling's script had everything but the proverbial kitchen sink.

By way of a climax to Forbidden Area the Government of the Soviet Union resigns after launching a sneak attack on the United States. The new Red government calls its forces back and the President of the United States decides under the circumstances not to start a war that would wipe out civilization. The hero and heroine embrace.

This ridiculous denouement followed a story about the landing of two Russian spies on American shores. In no time at all the two Communists worm their way into the most security-conscious branch of the Strategic Air Command. In the pantry at the air base they put pressure bombs in coffee containers and nearly blow up most of America's bombers. Even when the chef disappears the S.A.C. doesn't get wise.

Mr. Serling had a choice of several spy stories from the plot at his disposal, but he must have been watching too much television recently. Every cliché in the book of elementary video dramaturgy was employed.

It was a pity, too, that Playhouse 90 had such a limp take-off. The Columbia Broadcasting System obviously was not stingy with its production budget and there was an all-star cast with Charlton Heston, Tab Hunter, Victor Jory, Vincent Price, Charles Bickford and Diana Lynn.

The Strategic Air Command should ask for equal time. As a matter of fact, so should Russia.