

Out of Bounds

■ SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

reality TVs

During the penny-pinching years of college, ads that read "Sell Plasma. Earn Cash!" would beckon to my aching empty wallet. I knew kids who made about \$200 a month by sitting in chairs and letting people jab needles in their arms to suck out the clear, yellowish fluid component of their blood. Not surprisingly, these chaps always seemed tired.

So when the first wave of "plasma" televisions arrived on the market a couple of years ago, I conjured not-so-pleasant images of a manufacturing plant stuffed with gaunt people reclining on decaying lawn furniture with IVs running directly from their arms into a new flat-panel Sony. Thankfully, of course, the plasma in the TVs isn't as *Blade-Runner* meets *Running Man* as my over-active imagination wants it to be.

Instead, it's rather fascinating. Plasma, in this case, is a gas mixture of neon and xenon that gets sandwiched between two pieces of glass — the panel. The panel consists of pixels, an array of cells that contain phosphors corresponding to the colors red, green and blue. When a signal (your cable TV input) filled with electrical impulses hits the plasma, each of these cells absorbs the signal and then translates the energy into visible light — what you see on the screen.

So why is this cool? Well, plasma

PLASMA AND
HIGH DEFINITION
MODELS WILL CHANGE

THE WAY YOU LOOK AT THE
WORLD OF TELEVISION

BY MARK LUCE

TVs, unlike their standard predecessors, stay in perfect focus — always. Imagine watching a football game that leaps off of the screen or newly minted Gov. Ah-nold crisply telling you "I'll be back" on DVDs that look even better than normal.

The confusion comes, of course, when people start talking about high-definition televisions and plasma in the same sentence. High-definition televisions are those that possess a wider screen, contain vastly higher resolutions (780 pixels or 1,080 pixels as opposed to 240 pixels on a standard TV), which means far more picture definition. In short, HDTVs are the compact disc player to the standard television's turntable.

Before you rush out to buy one, however, prepare for some serious sticker shock. The low end of HDTVs will run about \$1,000 to \$1,500. The



middle range goes from \$1,800 to \$3,000 and tends to pack more screen size per price. The high end goes up, up and up. The I-am-king model is the Pioneer Elite Pro 1000, a 50-inch monster that looks, frankly, like reality. When I plopped down in a chair at Kief's Audio Video in my hometown to scope out the Elite Pro, it was so realistic I ducked when a pass came in my direction during the football game I was watching.

A word of warning about shopping for the things. Big-box chains, despite the promises of huge discounts off of list prices, are simply not the place to buy electronics. For better service, more knowledgeable staff and higher quality components, shop at an independent electronics store. It may seem more expensive, but remember that the money you think you may have saved was, most likely, an illusion.

And as you watch your new plasma or HDTV, you'll have to keep reminding yourself that the picture you see is only television.

Mark Luce a free-lance writer based in Kansas City, Mo., was sure Trent Green's pass was headed his way. He would have caught it, too.

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