



Syd welcomes back Will and Vaughn



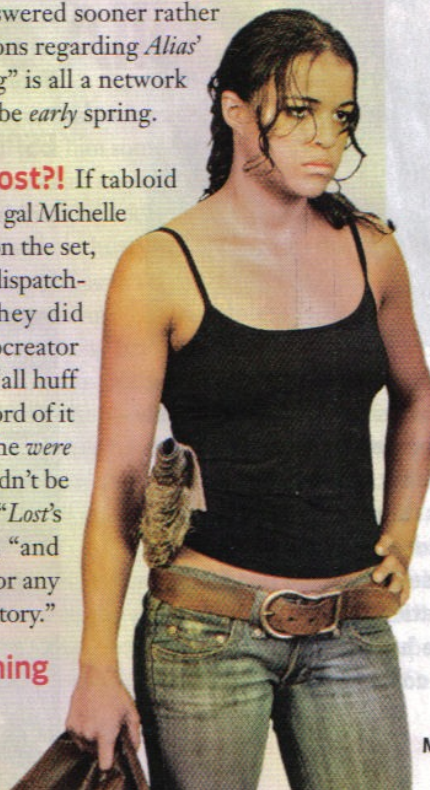
Alias' Big Finish! If there were any doubts that *Alias* would pull out all the stops as its series finale approaches, this story ought to erase them. Among the highlights of the show's final installments: the 100th episode, featuring Jennifer Garner reuniting with Bradley Cooper (Sydney's best buddy, Will). The landmark hour begins a month after Syd's baby is born and

finds the secret-agent mama "taking time off from work," executive producer Jeff Pinkner reveals. "Will is the thing that pulls her back in. The bad guys realize that the best way to hurt Sydney is through her friends." Did he say bad guys, plural? Yes, he did. The rogues' gallery of returning villains includes Gina Torres (Anna Espinosa), Lena Olin

(Irina), David Anders (Sark) and, yes, maybe even Merrin Dungey—who died both as Syd's friend Francie and her evil "twin," Allison. However, the big news is that Michael Vartan will appear in as many as six episodes as Syd's believed-dead love, Vaughn. "The rumors of his death were nothing more than rumors," Pinkner maintains, adding that questions surrounding Vaughn's fate are answered sooner rather than later. And what about questions regarding *Alias'* return to ABC's schedule? "Spring" is all a network rep would say. OK, well, it better be *early* spring.

Execs to Ana Lucia: Get Lost?! If tabloid reports are to be believed, *Lost* tough gal Michelle Rodriguez has become a handful on the set, prompting producers to consider dispatching Ana Lucia the same way they did Boone and Shannon. But series cocreator Damon Lindelof calls the gossip "all huff and puff and speculation. Not a word of it is true." He goes on to say that if he *were* going to whack Ana Lucia, it wouldn't be because of Rodriguez's behavior. "*Lost's* story is the star," the exec insists, "and no actor would ever be killed off for any other reason than supporting that story."

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Michelle Rodriguez



Assante starred on the soap *The Doctors* in the '70s

Armand Assante Nursed on *ER*

Armand Assante's going to heat up the *ER*. The broodingly macho 56-year-old actor ("The Mambo Kings") begins a multi-episode arc on March 9 as Richard Elliot, a hedge-fund managing mogul who suffers from MDS—a bone marrow disease that affects his ability to make blood cells.

After passing out in his limousine, Elliot is rushed by his driver to County General, where he bonds with nurse Sam Taggart (Linda Cardellini). "He sees himself in her [when he was younger]," says *ER* exec producer R. Scott Gemmill. "She's a struggling single mom, and he struggled too. He had to step on a few necks to get to where he is. Eventually he offers her a job as his night nurse."

No, Cardellini, 30, isn't leaving *ER*. Her character and her son are just moving into his plush lakeside estate for a major lifestyle change. Will nurse and patient become romantically involved? "That's one of the reasons we wanted to bring in Armand," Gemmill says. "We wanted a sexy, charming, middle-aged man, who has an undercurrent she has to beware of. And Armand has got what it takes to pull that off." —*Mary Murphy* | **ER AIRS THURSDAYS, 10/9c, NBC**