Sex, scandal and sprogs

Sarah Lang discovers the new *Outrageous Fortune* season has the West family beset by outside forces – and facing a baby boom.

**BATTLING FOR BABY:** Jane (Stella King) and Loretta (Antonia Prebble).

**FRAMING YOUR father for burglary, sleeping with his mistress while impersonating your twin, getting yourself hunted up to make your enemy look bad, trying to sell your baby ...**

Very little is out on bounds on aptly titled local series *Outrageous Fortune*, and that's just a few of last season's highlights. Already the country's longest-running drama, *Outrageous* will break more New Zealand telly ground when fervently awaited season five starts on June 2.

Chock-full of cleavage, ciggies, rum, rows, scuffles, swearing, love triangles and those notorious sex scenes, the show orbits around the working-class West Auckland West family, their lovers, haters and associates. Leopard skin-loving, chain-smoking matriarch Cheryl, played by Robyn Malcolm, has her hands full trying to keep her errant family together and out of trouble – or at least to stop her adult kids (ditzy Pascalle, cunning Loretta, lawyer Jethro and his perpetually-stoned twin Van) from fitting up and fighting each other.

While the family screws things up for each other more often than not, when the chips are down the Wests stick together. And these eternal underdogs take us along on their roller-coaster ride.

That family heart, Kiwi-banter characters, perfectly pitched storylines, and a clever mesh of drama and comedy are some of the reasons *Outrageous Fortune* has been dubbed the best television New Zealand has ever made. Since its first season in 2005, the South Pacific Pictures show has been a hit with viewers. In 2007, it was TV3’s top local show, and last year it rated even better, pulling in an average 777,000 viewers per episode. That made it the second-highest-rating peak-time series across all channels, second only to *Desperate Housewives*.

Our most-decorated drama, *Outrageous* took home a trolley-full of trophies from last year’s Qantas Film and Television Awards, with eight wins, including best drama, and all three directing nominations.

Continuing its Midas touch, *Outrageous* has screened in Australia, Canada, Serbia, UK, Italy, Greece, Ireland and across Europe and Asia on cable networks. Picking up on a winning formula, localised versions have been made in the UK (*Howards*), and US (*Good Behavior*). Meanwhile, all four DVDs have hurtled into the top 10, the soundtrack *Wente Rode* has gone platinum, and on www.outrageousfortune.co.nz, diehard fans buy the T-shirts, soak up quizzes, quotes and Q&As, discuss topics such as “Cheryl’s wine glasses” and speculate on storylines.

So great is the fans’ appetite that a book *The West Family Album* will be published in August. This “ultimate guide” to *Outrageous Fortune* details everything from the contents of Pascalle’s handbag to Van and Munter’s ‘Tool Guy’ code, plus a drinking game, quiz, photos and interviews.

Recently, there has been media speculation that, given the show’s financial success, cast members had pushed for more pay and that South Pacific Pictures had responded by threatening to pull the plug. Asked to respond, a SSP spokesperson says: “There was no issue about pay rates and we don’t wish to comment further on this as it relates to confidential contractual details. However, we would like to note the story in the *Sunday Star-Timer* was incorrect.”

Whatever the actors’ pay rates, they’re earning every penny in season five (catch the trailer on YouTube). Expect the Wests to set the outrageous bar even higher this season, as they defend themselves against outside forces, particularly scheming siblings Sheree and Nicky Greggan. In last season’s emotional finale, Grandpa got married, a contrite Loretta moved back home, wealthy widow Pascalle announced a shock engagement to Nicky, and viewers were left hanging on various scores. How much more will Nicky scam out of Pascalle, and will they tie the knot? Has Wolf left for good? Will Sheree find out her twins are Jethro’s, not Van’s? Will Loretta reform or perhaps get back in bed with her baby’s father, Hayden?

With Cheryl and Sheree up the duff, and Kasey trying, season five will up the baby count. We can also reveal the peel of wedding bells, and that popular crin Eric is back in town. Meanwhile, new trouble-in-the-works character Detective Sergeant Gerard, played by easy-on-the-eye Charles Mesure, arrives to shake things up. The first episode begins with a raid on the West house. Is the smooth-talking cop out to get the Wests or has he got bigger fish to fry?

On www.outrageousfortune.co.nz, writer/co-creator/executive producer James Griffin dangles this teaser: Crooked property tycoon Gary won’t be back but expect a new character called Angel; natural-glow queen Suzanne Paul makes an appearance as herself; there’s some “very traumatic moments”, and “it’s highly likely that someone will end up in prison”.

An undisclosed West Auckland house is used for exterior scenes, but the West house interior is a set at the sprawling maze of SPP’s Henderson HQ. It’s as though a rudimentary house has
AST MONTH, Woody Harrelson attacked a member of the living dead at New York’s LaGuardia airport. Disappointingly, this was not a zombie attack but a brawl instigated by an American Airlines stewardess. Harrelson was under assault by a gang of snappers who were trying to get a good shot of him leaving the airport. Harrelson, who was in his dressing gown and slippers, was not impressed. “I’m not as ballsy as Pascalle but I’m getting there,” he said. Harrelson is currently in New York filming a movie called Shadowland, in which he is playing a vampire. The movie is set to be released next month.

The latest zombie movie to hit the screens is called Shadows, directed by Tim Robey. The movie is set in a small town in the American South, where a group of teenagers are being attacked by a horde of zombies. The teenagers, led by a young girl named Lina Leandersson, are trying to survive the attack and make their way to the safety of a nearby town. The movie is a mix of horror and action, with plenty of gory scenes and exciting moments.

The casting for the movie was top-notch, with Lina Leandersson playing the lead role and Pascalle playing one of the supporting characters. The movie has received positive reviews from critics, who have praised the writing, direction, and acting. The movie is expected to be a hit with fans of the zombie genre.

In other news, the undead are invading mainstream culture. The recent success of the zombie film “28 Days Later” has led to a rise in zombie-themed literature, games, and TV shows. The success of the zombie genre has also led to a rise in zombie-themed artwork and fashion. The trend has become so popular that it is now a part of mainstream culture.

What this means for the future of the undead is hard to say. Some experts believe that the trend will continue to grow, while others believe that it will fade away. Regardless, the undead are here to stay, and they are taking over the world.