

## SHOWS THAT OUTLAST THEIR ORIGINAL CASTS

On Thursday, *ER*'s Noah Wylie (Dr. John Carter) will become the last original character to leave the series. Very few shows outlast the original casts, but *ER* and *Law & Order* are both managing it. Here are their secrets:

- 1 **Single-episode plotlines.** When playing willy nilly with characters, a show can't be cumulative. Viewers have to be able to jump on board at anytime.
- 2 **Consistent style.** When you know what to expect in some areas, it's easier to accept radical changes in others.
- 3 **Willingness to change.** When your audience knows a favourite character can't leave or die, it gets boring. It's safer to let an audience get attached to a single star and ride that attachment out, but doing so can set you up for failure. *ER* got its audience used to new blood and the regular axing of seemingly key characters right from the beginning. — JENNIFER SELK/DOSE