

The Best Show on TV

by Joe Mulder

"The Office" (NBC) – 2/9/2006 - 4/2/2006
"Huff" (Showtime) – 4/6/2006 - 8/26/2006
"Big Brother" (CBS) – 8/26/2008 - 10/4/2006
"South Park" (Comedy Central) – 10/4/2006 - 11/30/2006
"The Office" (NBC) – 11/30/2006 - 1/14/2007
"24" (FOX) – 1/14/2007 - 4/5/2007
"30 Rock" (NBC) – 4/5/2007 - 4/10/2008
"House" (FOX) – 4/10/2008 - 10/5/2008
"Dexter" (Showtime) – 10/5/2008 - 11/18/2008
"The Shield" (FX) – 11/18/2008 - present

I've been a bit worried lately. I was facing something of a lose-lose situation with the seven-season run of "The Shield" coming to an end. You see, if I gave the show the Best Show on TV Title as a sort of lifetime achievement award, it might compromise the integrity of this list. Yet if a show as great as "The Shield" went off the air without ever having held the Best Show on TV title at any point in the title's almost three-year existence, it might compromise the integrity of the list.

My worries intensified as Season 7 debuted with confusing, convoluted episode after confusing, convoluted episode. The series finale airs on November 25th; what was I to do? But then, in the last couple of weeks, things got really good.

And, after Tuesday night, I needn't worry anymore.

[warning: mild "The Shield" spoilers ahead. Although, to be honest, if I hadn't ever seen "The Shield," and then I read the following, and then I went and watched "The Shield," I would think to myself, "you know, those spoilers weren't so bad"]

In the show's pilot, Los Angeles police detective Vic Mackey (Michael Chiklis) murders a fellow cop. He does this because the officer was a mole, assigned to Mackey's "strike team" to bust them for their rampant corruption. When he and his team aren't working on the case of the week, the majority of Mackey's time throughout "The Shield's" run has been spent trying to stay one step ahead of politicians, fellow cops, internal affairs guys, family members, gang bangers and anyone else who might be able to put him away for the murder. Or for any of the myriad crimes he and his team committed in its wake.

Which brings us to the final scene in Tuesday night's episode. For reasons that I won't get into, Vic is offered a deal by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). They want his connections to L.A.'s criminal underbelly, and they imagine he's not much dirtier than your average dirty cop. Just as his crimes are finally about to catch up with him, he is offered immunity for any and all prior crimes to which he confesses at the time he signs the deal, and only for those prior crimes to which he confesses at the time he signs the

deal. ICE knows he's not squeaky clean, but they figure maybe he falsified some reports here, ignored some gang activity there, or roughed up a suspect once in a while, all in the name of getting the job done.

Instead, in a scene that I would describe as downright Shakespearean if I wasn't worried that would under-sell it, Vic must sit in a room, across from another human being, and confront exactly what he has done and what he has become by literally saying the words out loud. The look on Michael Chiklis's face as he lists all of his transgressions, his fate predicated on forgetting none of them, lets us know that for Vic, finally having to say it means it's real. All those things he did: they're real. That's him. He can't hide behind his rationalizations any longer. Meanwhile the entire deal is contingent on his providing the full measure of his efforts to ICE, which will now be looking for any excuse to break the agreement.

What will such a man do now? Will he opt for a scorched-earth approach, attempting to burn down everything and everyone around him in an effort to secure his own freedom? Will he decide that enough is enough, and agree to accept the punishment he must know he deserves? The way "The Shield" has set it up, no one knows. At this point, I doubt that Vic himself knows. I can't imagine a series finale with higher stakes. I can't wait to see what happens.
