

### Joe's Top Ten TV Shows of the 2008-2009 Season

by Joe Mulder

A little minor housekeeping before we get PoopReading.com's First (Annual?) Top Ten Shows on TV Week going.

First of all, the ground rules:

These are shows that have been airing new episodes in the last year, so no syndicated or old shows. It's open to reality shows, news programs, talk shows... any television show that is currently producing new content. And the rankings are based on how good or bad they were *this* season - career excellence is ignored.

Also, it should bear mentioning that I don't watch "Mad Men." I have DirecTV, and DirecTV doesn't carry AMC in HD, so I feel as far as "Mad Men" goes, I feel as though I have been specifically asked not to watch it. I have seen a few episodes, too, so it's not as though I have no idea what I'm missing. But the way people talk these days, I feel like any Top Ten TV Shows of Last Season list that doesn't have "Mad Men" at or near the top should probably start by explaining why.

Now then, let's get on with my last ever Top Ten TV Shows of the Season List that won't have "Glee" at #1 (for as long as "Glee" stays on the air, at least).

10. "Worst Week" (CBS) What a shame. Before "Worst Week" premiered last fall, anyone paying attention to CBS's abysmal promotional campaign would probably have known it only as "that show with a guy in a plastic diaper." I'm not saying I know exactly how the show should have been sold to the public, but perhaps making prospective viewers aware of the conceit of the show - it's essentially a farce in which the main character, Sam (Kyle Bornheimer), continually finds himself in awkward and uncomfortable situations that escalate to ridiculous extremes, often through no fault of his own. Imagine the episode of "Cheers" where Woody gets married, only in a single-camera format.

Given the show's title, one suspects that Season 1 was initially to have encompassed one week in Sam's life, as he and his pregnant fiancée Melanie spend some time at the home of her parents (Nancy Lenehan and the gloriously well-cast Kurtwood Smith) and try to find the best time to tell them that they're going to get married and have a baby. The "week in the life" device was abandoned early on, but Sam's desperately earnest determination to get his in-laws' approval remained a focal point of the show.

In any case, the show was very, very funny, and it's a shame that CBS pulled the plug because nobody watched it because the show's ads were so unappealing (I only discovered it

thanks to PoopReading.com contributor Jameson Simmons's Annual TiVo Gauntlet of New Fall Programming, during which Mr. Simmons is kind enough to watch every single new show for us).

Anyway, here's the sort of thing you missed: Melanie has an African-American brother named David. David is a doctor, and recently spend time in Kenya working with impoverished children. Now, he's back in town just in time for what was, if I remember correctly, Sam and Melanie's wedding. Earlier in the episode, Sam had inadvertently caused a bit of racial tension with the leader of the wedding band, who was black. Later on, someone (I can't remember who, but it doesn't matter) was injured and David was attending to her. Sam came in the room, and for whatever reason David had to leave, saying there was nothing he could do. In a good-natured, brotherly way, Sam started teasing him, something along the lines of, "oh, I thought it would be good to have a doctor in the house; a lot of good you are around here!" Just as David - who had just returned from Kenya, remember - left the room and, unseen by Sam, the bandleader appeared in the doorway, Sam shouted "Why don't you just go back to Africa!"

There was also the time where Sam, for reasons too complicated to explain here, ran into the bathroom and snatched his father-in-law's newspaper right out of his hands while his father-in-law was pooping.

To say I'll miss "Worst Week" is an understatement.

9. "Top Chef" (Bravo) I do love the competitive reality shows. "Survivor," "The Amazing Race," "Project Runway," "American Idol" (though the percentage of that show through which one fast-forwards is growing every year), etc. But the cream of the crop last year was "Top Chef." I'm not sure how or why it's so good; after all, you can't exactly taste each contestant's dish to see who did the best job on any particular challenge.

It's a very well-executed show, though, and I think what it does is that it gets you thinking about food, about recipes, about ingredients. You (or at least I) can't create anything approaching the level of sophistication shown on the program (I've watched four-plus seasons of the show now, and I still couldn't tell you what a "reduction" is), but "Top Chef" puts certain foods, or types of food, on your radar and inspires you to prepare better food in your own life. My grilled scallops, my grilled shrimp, my skirt steak with chimichurri sauce... all were indirectly influenced by "Top Chef" in one way or another.

Just don't watch it hungry.

8. "Chuck" (NBC) "Chuck" was going along just fine, an amusing show about a hot chick, a doofy guy and Adam Baldwin (I'm not sure what more a person could want in a TV show than a hot chick, a doofy guy and Adam Baldwin,

to be quite honest), and then Scott Bakula and Chevy Chase came on board. I won't spoil anything for you, because you're going to want to check out the DVDs but, yeah. The last five episodes of this season took "Chuck" dangerously close to Top Five territory, or even beyond.

Somewhat miraculously, given "Chuck's" so-so ratings, the show was renewed for a third season. Season 2 ended on a note that suggests something of a retooling of the series, including a welcome excising of any subplots involving Chuck's former place of employment, Best Buy. I mean, "Buy More."

Not that the Buy More cast didn't do yeoman's work, particularly "Arrested Development" alum Tony Hale as Emmett Milbarge (one of the best character names ever, by the way. Whoever came up with "Emmett Milbarge" needs a hefty Christmas bonus). It was just that the Buy More plots always seemed shoehorned in.

7. "How I Met Your Mother" (CBS) "But Joe," you're no doubt saying to yourself, "didn't 'How I Met Your Mother' hold the title of The Best Show on TV at some point during this very TV season? How can it possibly be ranked as low as 7th?"

That's not a bad question. Yes, for a brief period during the middle of the TV season, "How I Met Your Mother" managed to steal the title with a knockout blow in the form of an episode called "The Naked Man." But that doesn't make it the best show of the season, any more than, say, batting .410 in July makes you the MVP when the voting takes place in October.

Not to take anything away from "How I Met Your Mother," but they caught lightning in a bottle with "The Naked Man" (and kept the momentum going with "Little Minnesota" and "Benefits"). The season as a whole earned the show a place on this list, to be sure, but one great month can't get you into the top five. Not this year, anyway. There's too much good stuff on.

6. "The Office" (NBC) I say it every year: how good must TV be these days, that a show as great as "The Office" doesn't even crack my personal top five?

The show continues to be great, seamlessly introducing (and removing) characters before anything has a chance to go stale. It speaks to the abilities of those in charge of "The Office" to keep things fresh and interesting that I've been watching the show since the beginning and even now, just weeks before Season 6 kicks off, I still think of it as a relatively new addition to my TV watching lineup.

5. "House" (FOX) Nothing really sexy about this pick. It seems like everybody got over "House" just as I was getting into it, but I don't really care. This year was just as good as any other. I'm not sure what else there is to say about

"House." Great show. Watch it.

4. "The Shield" (FX) Ah, "The Shield." "The Shield" would definitely be higher on my list if the season hadn't started off with plot twists confusing enough that even somebody who'd seen every episode couldn't quite follow them (although to be fair to "The Shield," the *somebody* in question is me, and I confuse pretty easily).

But toward the end of this season – the show's last – "The Shield" began to focus like a laser beam on the endgame. The series begins in Episode 1 of Season 1, you see, with Vic Mackey (Michael Chiklis) murdering a fellow police officer, and that act looms large over all seven seasons as Vic and his team try to stay one step ahead of that and various other transgressions.

As to whether or not Vic and his closest confidantes get what's coming to them at the end of "The Shield's" seven-season run, well, let me just say that I don't recommend planning to be able to think about anything else for a couple days after you watch the finale. But for a bit of a sluggish start to the season, "The Shield" would be ranked number one on this list. If not higher.

3. "It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia" (FX) They did an entire episode where the whole cast tried to figure out who kept pooping in the bed shared by Frank and Charlie! It was this whole Agatha Christie-type mystery! Are you kidding me? How am I supposed to resist a show like that?

2. "Dexter" (Showtime) Good as it ever was. I think "Dexter" is my "Mad Men," actually. The way everyone else seems to feel about "Mad Men," I feel about "Dexter."

You'd think the serial-killer-who-only-kills-other-killers thing might be getting old by now, but it's not. Although it will be interesting to see if Season 4 shakes things up a little, rather than following the same pattern that the show has been using, wherein someone becomes close to Dexter inevitably discovers who he is over the course of the season.

And, not to give anything away, but, you know how on "Gilligan's Island" somebody would wash up on the island every single week, and promise to help the castaways get back to civilization as soon as they could, but then the guest stars would find a way off the island and you'd never hear from them again? And they'd never send help? And after enough episodes you couldn't help but think that there were something like 250 people out there who knew the castaways' precise whereabouts, and it was getting less and less likely that they wouldn't be found if that many people knew where they were?

Well, on "Dexter," that's not a problem. Dexter is a serial killer, so you don't tend to end up with a lot of people walking around town knowing his secret.

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1. "30 Rock" What's there to say? "30 Rock" completed what may well have been its best season yet (granted, there have only been three), scoring a record number of Emmy nominations in the process. By now you either watch "30 Rock" and love it or you don't watch it and aren't going to, and since there's not much I can tell either of those two categories of people, I'll just point out two things: 1) in addition to being the best show in television, "30 Rock" continues to utilize magnificent guest stars in ways that never seem gimmicky or forced and always work splendidly (no less a star than John Lithgow appeared in what was essentially nothing more than a one-joke cameo, for heaven's sake!), and 2) the episode entitled "The Generalissimo" would almost certainly make my own personal list of the top five episodes of any television show ever. But then, that's a different list for a different day.

And hey, speaking of a different list for a different day, be sure to check back tomorrow when another one of PoopReading.com's esteemed contributors favors you with his list of the Best TV Shows of the Season. Who will it be? Will it be Brandon? Jameson? Mike? Some surprise celebrity list-maker, perhaps\*? The only way to find out is to check back tomorrow!

\* It won't be a surprise celebrity; it'll be Brandon or Jameson or Mike. Probably Brandon.

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