

# Episode 1: Special Offers' week. Part 1: dramas

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The Diary of a TV Series Addict

By Georgiana Ilie

September 27, 2010

*The third week of September is the toughest of the year for a TV series addict. All the important shows are being released, both last years' winners and the new-arrivals, ready to dethrone them.*

This week I went TV series *sampling* and *shopping*, meaning that I watched all the promising pilot episodes and I chose those in which I plan to make an emotional investment. My criteria are lax (I've watched **Heroes** up to the end, for example, although it turned out to be a complete disaster). The important thing is for it to make me laugh if it's a comedy; to make me think if it's a drama and not to make me turn my display on "time left" – as in not to bore me.

Last year my week was pretty well planned. It started on Monday with **Bored to Death** and **Dexter**, it went on with **House**, **How I Met Your Mother**, **Castle**, **The Big Bang Theory** and **Heroes** on Tuesday, **Parenthood** and **Men of a Certain Age** on Wednesday, **Modern Family** and **The New Adventures of Old Christine** on Thursday and on Friday with **30 Rock**, **The Mentalist**, **Community** and **FlashForward** (I've mentioned most of these TV series here, on LiterNet). But since then three of the shows got canceled (**Old Christine**, **Heroes** and **FF**), **The Big Bang Theory** airs on Thursday (which is Friday for me) and new temptations have surfaced: I've added **Mad Men** (Monday), **The Big C** (Tuesday) and **Futurama** (Monday). Therefore, in the end, the most honest criterion is that a new show should bring me something different.



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I haven't searched for new dramas because I already have about six of them on my list. I've tried **Undercovers**, J.J. Abrams' new TV series (**Lost**, **Alias**, the new **Star Trek**), but after having been served the whole plot (and all the jokes) in the trailer, I didn't have the patience to watch the pilot episode all the way. The same goes for the new **Nikita** (another remake of **Le Femme Nikita**, the forth, if I'm not mistaking), a sort of **Kill Bill** with women in bathing suits. It lacks the charm and statute of the cult-series I've watched in the previous edition, with Peta Wilson.

It was a whole different situation with **Boardwalk Empire**, the new HBO drama written by **The Sopranos**' screenwriter and directed by Martin Scorsese, starring Steve Buscemi and Michael Pitt, among others. I had read about **BE** in Rolling Stone – they had entitled Nucky Thompson, Buscemi's character, as one of the best TV series character of the new season even though the show hadn't been released. So I was curious and, at the same time, I was expecting to be irritated by it somehow. I thought that, as it was a period drama, it will either be too finical or too violent. And indeed it has an obvious violence, but it isn't accompanied by the intolerable strain of **The Sopranos**. It's rather familiar, in tune with the period, as I've seen in **The Gangs of New York**.

Amidst all the violence, it has an intricate story about alcohol trade during the Prohibition, a sociopathic mobster touched by the most unexpected things (but more like Don Drader than Tony Soprano in terms of structure), a young, ambitious sociopath who would stop at nothing in order to climb the social ladder, whore-houses, jazz and casinos. And other sociopaths: Lucky Luciano, Al Capone and others like them. And the FBI agents.

**Boardwalk Empire** (perhaps if I write it more often I'll stop calling it **Broadwalk Empire**) has earned its 42 minutes of my Monday.

Next week will be about comedies.

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## Episode 2: Special Offers' Week. Part 2: comedies

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### The Diary of a TV Series Addict

By Georgiana Ilie

October 4, 2010

2009 has been a generous year. The new comedies – **Bored to Death, Modern Family and Community** - have been so great that I was convinced from the very beginning that I would see them again this year. I was right. This didn't stop me from trying out the new offer as well.

Last year I had a saying: don't judge a series after its pilot. Although, they are, in theory, the best episodes of a series and also require a longer time to be created, they can only open the door just a little bit towards the promised universe. In a good series, the episodes that follow are more generous in meaning and the characters become more and more real. So if a pilot can make you resist watching it until the end, you have to give the series a chance by watching at least five of its episodes, in order to make a proper decision. Otherwise, you might just miss a pleasant experience.

This year I say: don't judge a pilot after its trailer. Trailers are a particular breed of cinematography. Those who create them are, in fact, copywriters who want to sell you a product and show you its most attractive attributes. Depending on the product, they can be wise jokes, great action scenes, or terrifying moments. Their mission is far from being accomplished if all the good parts are included in the trailer and there's nothing left for the pilot.

That was the case of **Outsourced**, an *awkward* comedy about a call-center manager, who is sent to India, in order to deal with the division of his company that was located there. The trailer (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-e7DndFck-k>) is somehow amusing, even if some jokes are predictable or of questionable taste. When I saw it, I thought of it as a light but promising comedy. That was up until I saw the entire pilot and realized that it was



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exactly the trailer plus some extra scenes among the jokes. Moreover, piled up into a 22 minute structure, all the jokes from the trailer that were acceptable in some way, had become a laughing stock, insulting the Indian culture.

Another series that I had been eagerly waiting for was **Shit My Dad Says**, inspired by a Twitter account (<http://twitter.com/#!/shitmydadsays>), on which a 29 year-old guy posts his father's witty words, a man at the age of 74 with a remarkable sarcasm. (Among the tweets there are: "*I didn't say you were ugly. I said your girlfriend is better looking than you, and standing next to her, you look ugly.*" or "*You worry too much. Eat some bacon... What? No, I got no idea if it'll make you feel better, I just made too much bacon.*"). The account was quite promising. Furthermore, the role of the father was to be played by William Shatner (Captain Kirk from the original Star Trek series, and tweeterer extraordinaire). The pilot episode was very little amusing, though, very little *edgy* and lacking credibility.

Less of a disappointment was **Mike and Molly**, about an overweight couple from Chicago, he a police officer and she a teacher. The series is created by Chuck Lorre, a man with whom I have a complicated relationship: I adore him for **The Big Bang Theory** (a geek sitcom) and also hate for **Two and a Half Men** (misogynistic sitcom). Sadly, Mike and Molly is on the same side with the latter. Predictable jokes and dull storylines.

But, there were three series that I liked, and thus I've given them the chance of watching five episodes in order to observe their evolution.

**Raising Hope** is a comedy similar to **My Name is Earl**, with white trash (southern poor people who live in trailers or something like that; a sort of American peasant). An 18 year-old guy suddenly wakes up with a child by a serial criminal, who was sentenced to death and executed. So he is the one left with caring for the 6 month-old girl, named Hope. His parents who had conceived him at the age of 15 and don't want any more children in the house, try to convince him to leave the baby girl in front of the fire fighters' unit. ("but not in the donation box; that's where old clothes and puppies are put into."). But the boy is determined to raise her all by himself and this is where the comedy begins. The series has black humor which makes me personally laugh, is very well played and has a coherent and credible universe.



**Running Wilde** is created by the same people who made the cult series **Arrested Development** and is similar to the absurd comedy recaptured also in **Saturday Night Live**. An extravagant billionaire (how else?) convinces his high school sweetheart, now a scientist who wants to live in the Amazon among the native tribes (how else?), to move on his domain so that her delicate and intelligent daughter (how else?) can grow up in civilization. In order to preserve her own fundamentals, the scientist lives in the tree house, not in the billionaire's huge castle. As he loves her, although he thinks little of her for not being rich and for working and she loves him in spite of the fact that she thinks little of him for being rich and not working, the story seems to unravel towards an adventurous romance.

Last but not least, I liked **Better With You**, a reasonable comedy about relationships. Closer to **How I Met Your Mother**, but without the risky humor, or **Friends**, but more modern, the series keeps track of three couples – one 7 weeks old, one 9 years old and one 35 years old. The 35 year-old couple are the parents of the girls from the two younger couples. Without following gender stereotypes, the script speaks very well for both sexes, and the situational humor is honest and well performed. Moreover, the characters are lovable, and make you care about what happens to them next week.

Should I have the time, I'll watch them all.

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## Episode 3: The Main Secondary Characters

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### The Diary of a TV Series Addict

By Georgiana Ilie

October 10, 2010

*Although I watch a TV series because of those who carry the imaginary world on their shoulders, I often find myself feeling more sympathetic towards some supporting character on whose loyalty the hero's legitimacy is built.*

My favourite character in **Rome** (taking into consideration only the first season, telecast now and then on Universal Channel) was Brutus, Caesar's ally and spiritual son. Although Caesar was taking up the whole screen and his strength was driving the entire plot (for which reason the second season, starting after his assassination, was as dull as ditchwater), his greatness was defined by his relationship with the devoted, righteous and humble young Brutus. Brutus had faith in the Republic, in the uncorrupted power of the patricians, in the traditional values upon which Rome had been built. He was devoted to his mother, to Rome, and, by extension, to the embodiment of Rome: Caesar. Brutus risked everything to help Caesar regain power in the aftermath of the war against Pompey, took Caesar's side against his enemies, ignored his enraged mother, Caesar's abandoned lover, and was loyal to Caesar. That is, until Brutus' good name became an obstacle in Caesar's way. There's a remarkable scene in one of the last episodes, a confrontation in which Caesar tries to manipulate Brutus to leave Rome for a while, and Brutus finally realizes that the man to whom he was loyal had long betrayed him.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o8vwmdLFWmE&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o8vwmdLFWmE&feature=player_embedded)



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Only then does Brutus turn into the murderer we have all read about in our history books. And only then does Caesar reveal his true nature. If up to this point we saw him through Brutus' eyes, we suddenly become aware now what a petty and power-craving soul hides behind his demagogic smile.

Brutus is the key through which we perceive everything.

In **Mad Men**, however fascinating I may find Don Draper, the most intriguing character is Joan Holloway-Harris, the executive assistant whose intentions and secrets remain more hidden than those of any other character in the series. Joan is the embodiment of the tragedy of the woman of the sixties: smart, competent, tactful, self-assured and way too beautiful not to be reduced to a mere sex object by the men around her and by herself. She can wrap men round her little finger but ultimately she ends up getting married to a never-fulfilled promise: a failed doctor, a man who can't find his place in the world and in their relationship, a cry-baby waiting to be saved. At work, the company relies on her organizational skills and on her talent to please all her superiors and buoy up all the subordinates. However, few people see her as more than just a secretary. She plays her part flawlessly both at home and in the office and waits for somebody to notice that she is the rock at the foundation of the world but, just like all tragic characters, at the end of the day she is alone.

Last but not least, in **Battlestar Galactica** (AXN), among all the leaders (Admiral Adama, Apollo, Gaius Baltar, Laura Roslin), angels (Starbuck, Caprica Six, Ellen, Athena) and damned souls (Saul Tigh, Boomer, Sam Anders, Chief Tyrol, Lt. Gaeta), I loved the one who wasn't any of these, captain Karl "Helo" Agathon. How could I not love a soldier who sacrifices himself to save a scientist in the first minutes of the pilot? When the last remaining spaceships were leaving planet Caprica, destroyed in a nuclear disaster, he gave up his place to someone whom he considered worthier to be saved than him. Then, trying to survive on the almost deserted planet, he fell in love with a cylon (one of the humanoid robots who had destroyed his world) and this remained his most distinctive feature throughout the four seasons. No matter how many hardships he faced (they were rescued and taken off Caprica, but the woman he loved was imprisoned as an 'enemy of the people', their daughter was taken away at birth and they were told she had died, then she was given back to them two years later, only to be kidnapped by cyclones), what best defined Helo was his loyalty to Athena. He risked his life to protect her, he defied public scorn, he disobeyed the orders of his superiors and, ultimately, he killed Athena so that she could come back to life on her mother-ship. More than the notables of mankind who realized they were infiltrated by cylon without their knowing it, Helo took on the



thankless job of the one who lives between two worlds, one belonging to the decimated people, and the other, to the ruthless robots, and saw, beyond the victimization of one side and the demonizing of the other, the grain of divinity they all had in common. And he never doubted his beliefs, because he had acquired them through love and not through logic. The story showed that Helo had been right all along, and without his loyalty and determination, the world would have been doomed forever.

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## Episode 4: Sugar high drama

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**The Diary of a TV Series Addict**

**By Georgiana Ilie**

**October 18, 2010**

*Their reality-shows are better than ours*

When I first saw *Top Chef*, I was fascinated by what some TV professionals can draw out of a competition in which 17 chefs compete for fame and for 125.000 \$. Tensions, betrayals, conflicts, conceits, forgiveness, emotions, blood, tears, liquid nitrogen burns, a lot of humor, well-built characters. I was excited about each episode and I didn't surf the internet before seeing the finale lest I should find out by mistake who the winner was (it wasn't my favourite).

I know that reality-shows are even further from reality than TV news. I know the tension is the result of the montage. I also know that the participants are selected according to some complex strategies of group dynamics. But with *Top Chef* (which was awarded an Emmy this year for the 6<sup>th</sup> season, the first one I saw), you are sure that the stake is real.

Unlike the Romanian reality-shows, in which some "actors" taken from the street awkwardly perform some roles, sticking to a script(see *Fight For Food*, *Daddy's Girl* or *The Taming of the Shrew*), and unlike some English/ American reality-shows based strictly on the mediocre acting of some minor stars or of some wannabes(the most recent successful example is *Jersey Shore*, but all the shows with "stars" from MTV and VH1 are included here too), *Top Chef* really has passionate chefs as competitors and their authenticity can be sensed in spite of all the montage artifices. They leave their jobs, mostly personal businesses, for six weeks, and at the end they may leave empty-handed. The risks they assume are huge, and you can't help but



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suffer along with them when their soufflés fall or when - *oh, the horror!* - one of the jury members spits out the food because it tastes horrible. It is not only a reality-show about cooking, but also one about surviving.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gWerCHZsP7U&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gWerCHZsP7U&feature=player_embedded)

Due to the fact that the show is successful, the producers (BravoTV, part of NBC) have developed a franchise. They first created *Top Chef Masters*, a competition of honour in which well-known chefs, who own many restaurants, were awarded Michelin stars and have many cookbooks on the market, try to win money for their favourite cause. It's something like "Dancing for you", with truffles, *scallops and ceviche* ( this show has significantly enriched my vocabulary). If in the original show it is the instinct for survival that attracts you, here you are captivated by the gallantry of those who have proven themselves in life. One of the most interesting challenges in Season 1 was choosing the ingredients for one of the competitors. I was expecting to see cocoa, garlic and cheese or other sabotaging combinations. To my surprise, each one of the four finalists chose what they knew their assigned couple loved most to cook, whether it was their favourite protein, or the details that stood at the base of their favourite meals. An admirable lesson of chivalry.

Finally, this year they launched *Top Chef: Just Desserts* and for the last few weeks I have been wondering why it took them so long to come up with this idea. It is brilliant.

In *Just Desserts*, only pastry chefs and bakers can compete. Their challenges are strictly related to desserts, varying from matching a cake to a cocktail to baking a chocolate dress. All the challenges have impossible deadlines ("Bake a delicious, completely decorated three-layered wedding cake in an hour" or "Prepare 500 cakes for a fair by tomorrow at 3. Let them be gourmet, but appeal to the children too") and the stake is high: 100.000\$. As compared to the prize offered in *Top Chef*, this one is small, but the expenses of a business only with desserts ( and its subsequent gains) are significantly lower than those of a restaurant. So actually the stake is much higher.



But the most important aspect is the personality of the competitors, who seem to form the highest concentration of drama queens per square meter. My guess is that it comes from the sugar they constantly inhale while preparing caramel, icing or buttercream. The result is dramatic: one of the girls cried her eyes out when her wedding cake collapsed, another competitor literally rolled on the floor when his *semifreddo* thawed, and later on he had a panic attack because he couldn't find some plastic glasses- finally the Ambulance came for him and he withdrew from the competition. During a challenge, a competitor took all the peanut butter and, as a response, another one took all the butter. While waiting for the jury to deliberate, they insult each other, and while in front of the jury, they accuse each other of doing nothing. Some live under the impression that they are treated unjustly and expect those who won the challenge to admit this. The personal interview excerpts are full of gossip. Gangs were formed- The Divas and the rest. Of course not all of them are like this and, quite the contrary, some of them keep an incredible common sense in that atmosphere, but the dramatic ones prevail.

And, due to the fact that everything that happens on the screen seems real and that the personal motivations of the competitors are touching without being pathetic, I feel the urge to say: "That's entertainment!"

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G79\\_mXoJAHw&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G79_mXoJAHw&feature=player_embedded)

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## Episode 5: Relationships ruin the series

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The Diary of a TV Series Addict

By Georgiana Ilie

November 1, 2010

*I can't even remember how many series have been ruined by the fact that the scriptwriters decided to get the two main characters together. From the classical Maddie & David to the more recent The Guardian, the story, the coherence of the characters and the charm of some well-conceived narratives, have been sabotaged out of the temptation of taking the relationships to the next level. Some others have managed to avoid this trap or to escape it in time.*

I have sighed for a whole season, along with all those who watched *How I Met Your Mother*, while watching playboy Barney play cat-and-mouse with Robin, his best friend Ted's ex-girlfriend. Barney symbolizes the man who cannot be tied up in a relationship (except the one he has with Ted and the one he has with his 1000 suits): he has dated over 200 women, he has numerous pick-up and dumping lines, and he is, undoubtedly, in a search for young women who are not very intellectually gifted and who have low self-esteem. This way he doesn't have to worry about anything. Although Robin is not as promiscuous as Barney, she is just as allergic to relationships, she doesn't back off from a good one-night-stand and is an independent and determined young lady. Moreover, Barney disgusts her because he treats women so badly. Inevitably, an irresistible attraction would appear between them. He wants her, but he doesn't want to hurt Ted. She wants him too, but she doesn't trust him. Neither of them wants a relationship. And a whole season (4) was like this, with the two of them causing us a great range of emotions, from frustration to anticipation and eagerness. Barney does tell her he loves her, but this confession is blended in a talk about guys who aren't cool and tell you they love you right from the start.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eqJ-YVb5mlQ&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eqJ-YVb5mlQ&feature=player_embedded)



During a triumphal season finale, the two of them get together. But it was all so wrong, that in the 8<sup>th</sup> episode of Season 5, they broke them up. If Barney didn't have any more pick-up lessons in store for us, it just wasn't funny any more. If Robin wasn't caught up in embarrassing love-life situations, we just didn't have what to laugh at. Together they were terribly boring, as though they had annihilated each other's awesomeness. The scenarists became quickly aware of the disaster and even made use of it to end the relationship naturally: they made them both fat and grubby, grumpy and peevish, unhappy and unrecognizable. It was clear, the relationship wasn't doing them any good. They ended it and saved the two characters, who were both adorable, especially Barney, before being destroyed. The season as such had to suffer because of this and only caught up to its rhythm close to the finale, being marked, however, by a few epical episodes, such as the one where Barney reactivates his pick-up schemes book. Every cloud has a silver lining, if I may say so.

The truth is that it is much more pleasant to watch the story of a seduction than to assist at the degradation that begins immediately after it. A few years ago, a great series, *The Guardian*, in which a young lawyer was caught red-handed with drugs, had to do community service in an abused children assistance center and fell in love with the assistant manager of the center, was ruined by the consummation of their relationship. In the first season, Simon Baker, who played Nick Fallin, was a Golden Globe nominee for his role, but in the second season, he completely disappeared from the landscape of the awards. Perhaps this isn't the most relevant criterion, but, in this case, it seemed to fit perfectly with what happened to the show. In the first season, Nick was clumsy, charming and very sad (his personal dramas were greater than the one caused by his drug possession sentence), while Lulu was caught between an engagement/marriage, which she thought to be everything she had ever needed from life, and this vulnerable man, who aroused her maternal instincts.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FwTvSJdKdzw&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FwTvSJdKdzw&feature=player_embedded)

In the second season, after Lulu's divorce and their getting together, they turned into a couple of monsters. He cheated on her with another drug addict and followed that path again and she played the role of the victim. A problematic pregnancy (the fetus had Down Syndrome) drove them even more



apart, and I can't tell you what happened by the end of Season 3, because I couldn't stand watching it any more. It was so much better when they longed for each other, in the dim light of Pittsburgh.

Others managed to avoid falling into this trap that completely changes the chemistry of a character. Even though in *Castle* the attraction between writer Richard Castle and the beautiful and smart police-woman he tags along with, as inspiration for his novels, Kate Beckett, is overwhelming, even though they often trick us into thinking they got together, even though when asked if they are together Castle replies "Not yet", they didn't get together and that was great. Just when you think it's about to happen, one of them does something stupid and misses the chance, and, in fact, you want them to miss the chance and have fun while watching another episode with them teasing each other, with their intimacy not being altered by jealousy, by frustrations that the other didn't take out the garbage or that the mother-in-law won't leave. Movies should at least be like this, holding on to that nice feeling at the beginning of a relationship.

In *The Mentalist*, there's another approach, just as efficient. Patrick Jane, the police consultant who hunts the serial killer who killed his wife and daughter, is not interested in having a relationship, even though you'd think he always flirts. Maybe because Simon Baker (the same actor from *The Guardian*) is a charming guy, a little bit strange, who smiles all the time as though he keeps telling himself a joke. In the first season, I thought something was going to happen between him and the leader of the team with which he works, but they kept a polite distance. In the second season, a psychic woman came in the scene and she told him she spoke with his wife - he didn't believe her, but went out with her on some sort of a date. He seemed to like her, but he never referred to her by something other than "my friend". And around her, he smiled a whole lot less. The situation cleared up for good when the woman was abducted by the same serial killer and returned crazy.

This approach fits perfectly in the atmosphere of the show because, even though he is a young and handsome man, Jane is a man on a mission, namely that of catching Red John and avenging his family, and a sentimental distraction would only ruin the narrative.



I am eager to see the impact of the fact that Dr. House and Dr. Cuddy are finally together, in *House M.D.* The cynical and misanthropic Dr. House is finally involved with somebody, namely with his boss, the woman who usually can't refuse him anything and who defies any (bureaucratic) storm for his moods. The first episodes from this series were so centered on their relationship and on Dr. House, who seems unable to define himself under the new conditions, and his hysterical behavior, that they were hard to swallow. Perhaps once the new situation establishes its own rhythm, the show will come back to normal. Due to the fact that *House M.D.* is so intelligent and sophisticated, I have reasons to believe that the team possesses the creative resources to maintain the coherence of the characters even if now they have breakfast together.

The main problem with these changes is that the scriptwriters rarely manage to create a feasible transition from the single character to the one involved in a relationship. The change causes such a great psychological rupture that the character becomes unrecognizable. It's like a new show starts. And I'm still happy with the old ones.

Translated by: **Mădălina Borcău** and **Mihaela Dănăciă**  
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# Episode 6: Too Smart for a TV Series

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## The Diary of a TV Series Addict

By Georgiana Ilie

November 8, 2010

*For a year I have been trying to write about **Community**, the best sitcom on the planet running at the moment (and that is coming from a person who has a passion for **How I Met Your Mother**, **The Big Bang Theory** and **30 Rock**), but every time I try, I know that I could not write something good enough to reach its level.*

Simply put, **Community** is about a *community college* - a kind of post high school where education is cheap in all respects. This is a school for those who are not accepted at a serious university (Annie, Troy, Abed), for those who begin higher education later (Britta), for the pensioners who have nothing to do at home (Pierce), for the divorced women who want to reinvent themselves (Shirley) and, last but not least, for the lawyers who were caught without a college degree in law (Jeff). All those mentioned above arrive in the same room when smooth Jeff claims he knows Spanish in order to impress beautiful Britta and so the word goes that he would lead a study group in Spanish. They become friends. And that is how the story begins. Only it is not so easy to explain why **Community** is so good. Is it because the characters are perfectly defined and played? Is it because the jokes are full of brilliant cultural references or because the action is unpredictable? Is it because each episode is a perfectly built jewel meant to arouse the most insane laughter and the most obscure memories? No matter what one might say, it cannot do justice to the sophistication of the series.

It stole my heart in the spring of 2009, when the trailer was aired.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sBCE9oIuN24&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sBCE9oIuN24&feature=player_embedded)



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And, unlike other series, the trailer is just a small part of the comedy and emotion you will find in each episode.

There is another aspect difficult to overlook: all the characters are endearing, some even adorable. The deceitful lawyer Jeff, although seemingly selfish, vain and indecisive, becomes the leader / father of the group because he knows how to always be fair and objective. Britta, the pomp and conceited blonde, has a good heart and more courage than Jeff when it comes to declaring her feelings. Annie, the acrid nerd who did not attend university because she had a problem with drug use in high school and went to rehab, is always in love with one of the boys and it's hard not to like her. Shirley, a bigot wearing old-fashioned clothes, who you love for trying to do something with her life; Pierce, despite the sexual / racist / sexist jokes he always makes, is nice because he strives to keep up with the younger people, although he doesn't understand their cultural references, nor what *cool* means. However, the best are Troy and Abed and their unexpected friendship. Troy seems to be the quintessence of the successful young man: handsome, athletic (he was the football star in high school), and he knows his way around girls. Abed is the *nerd*, who always watches serials, a bit weird, with fixed ideas and strange ways of interacting with others (and, although it is mentioned only once, he has symptoms of Asperger syndrome, a severe form of autism). And together they form the most adorable couple on Earth. Because Troy is in fact immature and *nerdy* and he perfectly understands what is important for Abed. And because Abed is incomprehensible to most of the people around him and Troy communicates exactly to his understanding.

Each episode ends with a scene in which those two ... bond. My favourite scenes are the ones below. Jeff sometimes appears too, and he does not seem to be any smarter.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EcD\\_Y838DXA&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EcD_Y838DXA&feature=player_embedded)

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a8kKbbdJTFA&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a8kKbbdJTFA&feature=player_embedded)

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VgMrNbM7tj8&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VgMrNbM7tj8&feature=player_embedded)



The opponents that they face every day are also important to the dynamic of the story. Señor Chang, the Spanish teacher of Chinese origin who terrorizes them in the first season; Dean Pelton, a creature of uncertain sexuality (and, especially, promiscuous) and with a passion for Jeff; Star-Burns, the cool student with star shaped sideburns (or is it marijuana leaves?) who always talks down to them, and Vaughn, the barefoot hippie with very, very small nipples (we know this because he never wears a T-shirt) who makes out with Britta, Annie and Pierce in turn. Well, he has a different relationship with Pierce, and writes a song about him.

Each scene of **Community** can be used here to exemplify how good, funny and relevant this show is. I cannot make it any clearer than this.

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## Episode 7: References

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### The Diary of a TV Series Addict

By Georgiana Ilie

November 15, 2010

*References are some kind of jokes that the scriptwriters make especially for the biggest fans of the series, in order to tickle their vanity. The more you know about the writer or actors, the better you understand their gags.*

In Castle, there are references to **Firefly**, **Buffy the Vampire Slayer** and **[Dr. Horrible Sing-Along Blog](#)**, because Nathan Fillion, who plays Castle, has played in all these three series. Some are very subtle, like in the scene where Nathan gestures an expression constantly repeated by River Tam, the slightly crazy girl on the Firefly ship: *two by two, hands of blue*.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W L-uoxmfe8&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W L-uoxmfe8&feature=player_embedded)

In another episode, while playing at home with liquid nitrogen (used in the molecular kitchen/cuisine), he dropped his watch in and said he froze time- just like Dr. Horrible and his freezeray. And, in one of the most intense moments of Season two, after shooting a villain directly in his hand, making him drop the gun, he states nervously : “I actually wanted to shoot him in the head”- one of Jayne’s famous lines from **Firefly**.

Others have a common understanding, like the episode from **Halloween** in which Castle walked around dressed in Mal Reynolds’ costume, motivating that he was trying it on for a party. He called himself “space cowboy” and was just then was investigating, in the cemetery, the murder of a young man



with vampire fang implants, who was driven a stake through the heart- reference to Buffy, where Filion played a feared negative character. The whole episode was actually a homage to Joss Whedon, the creator of the three series.

In **Community**, which is itself a metaphor for the American popular culture, you are always in the meta plan, through Abed's eyes, who only brings TV references. Everything that happens is filtered through the structure of a series, and you are being told this straight to your face. Abed sometimes narrates the episodes as though he wasn't part of the story, and this is how we got a M.A.S.H. episode, a season finale where we were told that all storylines should end, being afterwards given a cliffhanger (unsolved moment that keeps you in tension until the beginning of the season...sorry, of the next school year), and a bottle episode, in which the action takes place in only one room. If they ever decide to shoot a live episode, it will probably be narrated by Abed.

In **How I Met Your Mother**, where an actor from **Freaks&Geeks**, one from **Buffy** and one from **Doogie Howser** play, MD and Dr. Horrible made many references during the first seasons. There was actually an episode dedicated to **Freaks &Geeks**, in which Jason Segel danced the same disco dance from the last episode of **F &G**, while Neil Patrick Harris was dressed like Segel's character, Nick. But **HIMYM** quickly over-passed this phase, because it achieved, in its turn, huge popularity and found new sources of inspiration.

**The Big Bang Theory** is probably the series that bases itself mostly on references, and they all are from the geek/nerd universe. From the same **Firefly**, which is mentioned numerous times:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2jAePQzdXGg&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2jAePQzdXGg&feature=player_embedded)

(the sad joke is that it has been cancelled after less than a season), to any variant of **Star Trek**, from **Flash** and **Spiderman** to **Star Wars** and **Battlestar Galactica**. No joke is however too obscure, not even the computer-related ones: when Sheldon runs into his arch-nemesis again, namely



Wil Wheaton (the actor who played Wesley Crusher in **Star Trek Next Generation** and who plays here an altered variant of himself, called Evil Wil Wheaton), he tells him he is to him what Internet Explorer is to Firefox.

Some actors have the habit of announcing on Twitter when there is a reference in an episode- they actually challenge the fans to identify the reference, which is more fun. Thus, the game continues endlessly.

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## Episode 8: They only danced one season

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The Diary of a TV Series Addict

By Georgiana Ilie

November 22, 2010

*The American series market is extremely competitive. A show has to arrest the attention of at least 5 million viewers every week to pay off. Series that don't meet these expectations go down at the end of the season or, worse, even before that, because sometimes it's more profitable to air reruns or teleshopping instead. Some of them survive though in pop culture as victims of consumerism and superficiality.*

Of course, most of them deserve to be sunk. In 2010 they already cancelled **Undercovers**, a [Mr. & Mrs. Smith](#)-like story about chef-spies. Too familiar, too predictable. In 2009, **Flash Forward** was sunk at the end of the season, a sci-fi drama that might have become the new **Lost**, But it already featured so many shortcomings, oversights and inconsistencies in the first half a season that that the number of viewers dropped to 2 million.

Other shows sink because they are too smart and can't gather so many viewers. There are two aspects to this case though: advertisers seek this kind of audience, sophisticated and educated, because it buys cultural products and luxury services. On the other hand, even this audience needs to have a relevant critical mass. The successful stories in this category are **Mad Men** and **Dexter** (that barely reach 2 million viewers per show, but they make a stir online and in reviews) and **Seinfeld**, that, before it became the success we all know (76 million viewers for the series finale), had survived for four seasons out of the reputation that its audience was formed of the trend-setters sought by the advertisers.

Many other good productions got sunk before they got the opportunity **Seinfeld** got, going mainstream. Either because they appeared too early for the values or humour they were built on, either because they didn't have the time to find their critical mass.



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**Freaks & Geeks**, first aired in 1999, lasted less than a season. Only 12 of the 18 filmed shows were aired. The series, about two groups of high school misfits from the Midwest of the early 80's, was a subtle social depiction, with good humor and complex characters. The cast was excellent - among the "graduates" from **Freak & Geeks** are James Franco, Seth Rogen, Jason Segel, Busy Phillips, Linda Cardellini, Rashida Jones, Shia LeBoeuf, Jason Schwartzman and others, all at their first part. Today, the actors and creators (Judd Apatow, who makes successful comedies, and Paul Feig, who directs **Nurse Jackie**, **The Office** and **Mad Men**) are famous, the show seems a sign of success that shouldn't have surprised anyone. In 1999, however, no one believed in it.

**Undeclared** came one year later delivered by some of the staff members of **F & G**: Apatow and some of the actors, as Rogen and Segel. Lighter, in sitcom format, the show follows the lives of some college freshmen and their love problems. Sometimes Ben Stiller, Adam Sandler and Amy Poehler also star in the show, comedians who even at the time were quite famous. Without imitating the tone of **Freaks & Geeks**, the show managed to be equally funny and original. It was canceled in mid-series.

**Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip** is a masterpiece created by Aaron Sorkin (**The West Wing** and the new and controversial **The Social Network**) about life behind a live variety show. The show is similar to **Saturday Night Live**, the most famous American comedy show (in Romania one can watch it on **Antena 2**) and behind the curtains there is a compelling story about how to build humor, about creativity and originality. Dialogues are fast and clever (Sorkin's trademark), the characters are complex and delightful, the actors' performance is excellent (Matthew Perry playing the part of his life, Sarah Paulson charming as a character inspired by the comedy actress Kristin Chenoweth, Amanda Peet proving her talent as a manager with moral principles). It was canceled after its first season. It can be watched these days (Monday to Friday) on ProCinema, at 19:00.

**Firefly**, a sci-fi drama created in 2002 by Joss Whedon (**Buffy the Vampire Slayer**) about a crew of renegades who roam the planets in the Sino-American Alliance in 2500, searching for jobs to help them survive. The show made Nathan Fillion a sci-fi fans' icon because the character ([http://atelier.liternet.ro/articol/9028/Georgiana-Ilie/Cpt-Mal-Reynolds-FireflyEroul-pe-care-il-iubesti-pana -to-moarte.html](http://atelier.liternet.ro/articol/9028/Georgiana-Ilie/Cpt-Mal-Reynolds-FireflyEroul-pe-care-il-iubesti-pana-to-moarte.html)) he interprets is one of the most complex and charming to appear in the genre. Just like **Freaks & Geeks**, **Firefly** had a cast of obscure actors that are now most famous in



television: Nathan Fillion stars in **Castle**, Adam Baldwin in **Chuck**, Summer Glau has created a new sci-fi imagery in **Terminator: The Sarah Connors Chronicles**, Alan Tudyk and Morena Baccarin are starring in the new hit **V**). The show was massacred by FOX, its broadcaster: the episodes were aired in a different order than Whedon had wanted, they kept changing the airing time and finally it was canceled before the end of the season. Nevertheless, it managed to stir the audience (reflected by DVD sales) so that in 2005 the team got to make the end that the story deserved: a cinema movie that closed the narrative arch Whedon had intended. It is natural, somehow, that a series about the nostalgia of a lost world (the crew came from an army defeated in the war that installed the new empire) should, in return, seed so much nostalgia among viewers.

**Dollhouse**, Whedon's project as well, did a little better: it lasted for a season and a half. And not because it wasn't good. The series tells the story of a woman who dedicated five years of her life to being a rentable body in a sort of luxury brothel / assassins retreat of the future. All the agents are empty souls, devoid of memories, and they are printed with special abilities and psychological traits depending on the specific of the mission they have to fulfill. Whether they must kill or rescue someone, whether they act as ideal girlfriends / boyfriends, they all carry out their tasks flawlessly and the company takes large fees. Then everything is erased and the agent may start afresh. But not even science is perfect, and the company isn't exactly honorable and the line between voluntary membership and slavery, when agents don't know who they are, is very thin. As with all of Whedon's productions, the audience enters a coherent world, consistent with the values we know, with characters caught in terrible moral dilemmas and led by a superhuman will. But that hasn't been good enough. The list could go on with **Smith**, a show with Ray Liotta and Simon Baker, about a gang of hit men, canceled after seven episodes; **Arrested Development**, a brilliant comedy with Jason Bateman and Michael Cera canceled after two seasons; and the fresh **Running Wilde**, another sophisticated comedy canceled after five episodes. The list will probably increase annually until the number of canceled good series will reach the critical mass to open a broadcaster just for them. Or at least an online channel.

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