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Farrah Fawcett Is Hospitalized



Madonna Tot's Dad Found: 'At Last I Can Be Part Of Mercy's Life'



Reality Show Choreographer Accused Of Raping 4



Michael Giltz

Posted September 12, 2008 | 03:52 PM (EST)

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You can talk about plot twists and dumb storylines and internal strife. But I can tell you the main problem with *Grey's Anatomy Season Four* (\$59.99; ABC Studios) -- that problem is *Private Practice First Season* (\$39.99; ABC Studios). (That comes out on Tuesday, September 16.) It never fails. Someone launches a successful series, a show that brings them acclaim and big ratings and will literally make them rich for life. So do they focus on that show and try to make it as good as it can possibly be? Sometimes. But usually, they get suckered into spin-offs and

launching other shows or movies and instead of one good show, you get two weak ones. Maintaining the quality of a primetime series is a backbreaking job. But doing it for two shows? That's pretty much impossible. I really don't understand why anyone would even try. You become richer than God if you create a hit primetime show like *Grey's Anatomy*. And when it's reached the end and you want to make something new, people will line up to do business with you. So why spoil your baby with a bunch of new projects? It's almost worse than what David Milch did when he dumped *Deadwood* to make the horrible *John From Cincinnati*. I mean, at least he just stopped *Deadwood* rather than let it become a mess. *Battlestar: Galactica* was easily one of the best shows on TV, getting better year after year -- until season three. Guess what was occupying their minds? A spin-off set in the past called *Caprica* that will in fact begin after this show is over. *CSI: Miami Sixth Season* (\$79.99; Paramount) is one of the most popular shows in the world. But is there anyone who thinks that the unique blockbuster success of the original *CSI* hasn't been diluted by two indistinguishable spin-offs? I mean, how many blood splatters and hair fibres can you analyze, anyway? If *The Wire* had a fifth and final season that wasn't quite the equal of the brilliant fourth, you might look at the energy its creators put into launching *Generation Kill*. TV is littered with countless other examples of people dropping the ball on a great show because they got distracted by the lure of spin-offs and other projects that could give them a media empire. And far rarer is the example of a show like *Cheers*: a massive hit whose creative team stayed with it to the end and then -- and only then -- launched a spin-off. Is it any surprise that *Frasier* is arguably the

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greatest spin-off in TV history?

So tell me, any recent TV shows break your heart by falling apart in quality?

Also out this week:

Cult Classic -- The reputation of *The Big Lebowski* (\$19.98; Focus) and the iconic status of the Dude continue to grow. Has it really only been ten years since this Coen Brothers comedy came out? It seems like it's been around forever. For \$34.98; hardcore fans can get a copy of the DVD housed in a plastic bowling ball.

Best Reason To Buy A Plasma TV -- *How The West Was Won* (\$20.98; Warner Bros.) is out in a three disc set fully exploiting its eyeball expanding Cinerama. The movie's a bit stolid, with John Ford's entry clearly the leader in quality, but it's definitely a spectacle. And the bonus documentary on Cinerama is almost as much fun on its own. Seriously, I really need to get a plasma TV.

Comedy's Secret Weapon -- If you read the comedy issue of **Rolling Stone** currently on newsstands, you'll notice one name popping up a few times: Peter Cook. He truly was a seminal figure on British comedy on par with Monty Python. Check out *Peter Cook and Dudley Moore: The Best Of...What's Left Of...Not Only...But Also... (\$24.98; BBC Video)*, which offers up highlights from their seminal early sketch series and you'll begin to appreciate his genius.

Once Upon A Time -- *Shelley Duvall's Faerie Tale Theatre* (\$99.98; Koch) was the best -- okay, the only -- reason to buy Showtime in its early years. Duvall charmed all her friends into appearing for peanuts and the result was that oft-described phenomenon: a labor of love. How else to explain a top actor like Robin Williams playing the Frog Prince or such quirky casting as Klaus Kinski (as the Beast) and Paul Reubens as Pinocchio. This boxed set contains all 26 episodes and more extras than the 2005 set, including the retrospective cast party and Duvall's pitch reel. For fans of Jim Henson's *The Storyteller* and anyone who delights in charming, witty family entertainment.

Britcoms -- Every Saturday night all across America, PBS stations air a block of British sitcoms and dub them Britcoms. My mom never misses it, even if they are all reruns and she's seen them a dozen times over. The lineup changes from town to town and runs from the sophisticated lunacy of *Fawlty Towers* to the banality of *Are You Being Served?* But there's one constant: class. I don't mean "classy." I mean "class" as in social status. Is there anywhere in the world more obsessed with class and social distinctions than England? India has its caste system too, I guess; they're just not as funny about it. Two amusing Britcoms embody that. *Keeping Up Appearances: The Full Bouquet* (\$129.98; BBC Video) has fun with Hyacinth Bucket (pronounced "Bouquet"), who desperately wants to maintain her non-existent high standing in the community but is cursed with low-class relatives. You'll find virtually no variation to the formula: Hyacinth wants things to be just so and her relatives or friends or someone puncture her dreams but she behaves as if she's the Queen of England anyway. It's not great, but it's certainly consistent. Of a higher class in every way is *To The Manor Born* (\$79.98; BBC Video), the witty 1979 series in which Audrey Hepburn-Hamilton (the great Penelope Keith) must sell her stately home to a...tradesman (a wholesale foods magnate, actually) and move into the estate's tiny cottage. Not that this keeps her from interfering and disapproving at every turn. Sparkling dialogue abounds. And how do they maintain that class? Three seasons, 20 episodes and then they call it a day. (This set also contains a Christmas special and a 25th anniversary reunion show, radio shows and more. Even more class.)

Horror -- *Child's Play 20th Birthday Edition* (\$14.98; MGM) is a suitably playful special edition of the B movie romp that includes audio commentary from actors, writers, producers...and even Chucky himself. *Fox Horror Classics Vol 2* (\$19.98; Fox) and though it only contains 3 more movies, this set sure ranges far: *Chandu The Magician*, a serial remake with Bela Lugosi as the villain (he would later play the hero); Vincent Price in the gothic tale *Dragonwyck* and the offbeat drama *Dr. Renault's Secret*. All fairly obscure and hard to find so consider that a comment on Fox's weak bench when it comes to classic horror or a happy example of half-forgotten movies getting a new life thanks to being randomly packaged together. But if you really want a horror film, try *Foreign Exchange* (\$24.98; Screen Media) a would-be high school romp with sex hungry males feasting on the super-hot foreign exchange student.

TV on DVD -- *Ugly Betty Second Season* (\$59.99; ABC Studios) also lost its way during the show's second season. They let the telenovela take over with wacky storylines and ignored the heart and soul of the show -- Betty (America Ferrera). More Betty, less bombast! *Medium Season 4*

"Washington Unplugged"

Arianna was on CBS' "Washington..."

Alex Leo The "Real Housewives Of New York City" Flowchart Of Hate

I'm a little embarrassed to love this show as much as...

"BRUNO" TRAILER! Calamity, African Babies, Chase Scenes And More (NSFW VIDEO)

IT'S HERE! The trailer for this July's Sacha Baron Cohen...

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Another night, another fashion opportunity for NATO leaders and their spouses! See...

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John Oliver was upset enough to drop his monocle when he...

Obama Teases Reporter From India During Press Conference (VIDEO)

Obama held a conference packed with press from around the world on Thursday. He called...

Jim Cramer Declares The Depression "Over" (VIDEO)

On Thursday's episode of "Mad Money" host Jim Cramer declared that the depression...

Scientists Find Rocket Fuel Chemical In Infant Formula

ATLANTA — Traces of a chemical used in rocket fuel were found in samples of...

Least Wasteful Cities In America (SLIDESHOW)

It's great to love the city you live in, and better to

(\$59.98; Paramount) gets a lot of mileage out of Patricia Arquette's Allison Dubois being outed as a psychic and how that upends her life. Just as long as they don't find out she's a hockey mom. *It's Always Sunny In Philadelphia Season 3* (\$39.98; Fox) has 15 snark-filled episodes with Danny DeVito having a blast in episodes purposefully revolving around tasteless topics like who's been sleeping with a pre-op transexual...again. *Jon & Kate Plus Eight Seasons 1 & 2* (\$19.95; Genius) is a reality series about a couple that had twins and then sextuplets and if that doesn't scare you off artificial insemination, then nothing will. *Wings Seventh Season* (\$39.98; Paramount) draws to a close this modest, but well-cast comedy with Tim Daly and Steven Weber. Yes, the *Cheers* folk launched it, but that original show had been around for seven years and they still stayed day to day on the important one.

Kids Stuff -- *Alvin and the Chipmunks Go The Movies* (\$16.99; Paramount) is lazy kid's programming -- just episodes riffing off movies like Batman and Indiana Jones and even lazier packaging. This is the latest rehash of some of these episodes and since we're talking about shows that aired almost 20 years ago, why not include ALL the parodies in one set rather than mixing and matching them again and again? *The Best Of Barney* (\$19.98; Lionsgate) collects just 60 minutes of highlights from the properly maligned children's show. They describe it as "super-dee-duper" and that about says it all. *Legion of Super Heroes Vol. 3* (\$14.98; Warner Bros.) collects just five episodes from the series, which means you'll have to buy five volumes to get all the shows from the first two seasons rather than two volumes with each 13 episode season complete. I'm noticing a pattern here. On a happier note, *The Sylvester and Tweety Mysteries First Season* (\$19.98; Warner Bros.) do indeed contain all 13 episodes from the show's first season. Unfortunately, it ran in 1995, long past the heyday for these characters. *Thomas and Friends: The Great Discovery* (\$19.98; Lionsgate) is at least a new feature length film with Pierce Brosnan providing voice-work as the narrator. Back to the bad news: *The Spectacular Spider-Man: Attack Of The Lizard* (\$19.94; Sony) tries to con people into buying the first three episodes of the new cartoon series. Just wait for the full-season DVD set or you'll feel as much of a chump as Peter Parker. Finally, *Tortoise Vs. Hare* (\$19.98; Genius) is a so-so animated film that can't live up to the high Jim Henson standards even though it's released under that banner. If it seems like a bad week for kid's stuff, don't forget that *Shelley Duvall's Faerie Tale Theatre* is out.

Blu-Ray -- Jackie Chan and the not-so-retired Jet Li co-star in *The Forbidden Kingdom* (\$39.99; Lionsgate) is just the sort of action title fans want on Blu-Ray, even if it does cost \$5 more than the Special Edition DVD and \$10 more than the standard DVD. *Cool Hand Luke* (\$28.99; Warner Bros.) is not one of those naturals, but what a terrific movie. Paul Newman has rascally charm to spare and maybe knowing a whole bunch of new people are appreciating his work will lift the ailing actor's mood. *The Fall* (\$38.96; Sony) proves director Tarsem is the most original visual stylist to hit Hollywood since Terry Gilliam. *Smallville Seventh Season* (\$79.98; Warner Bros.) marks the arrival of Supergirl, which of course means that the show has long ago run its course and they know it: the eighth season will probably be its last.

This and that -- Jason Statham has probably his biggest success yet (when you look at reviews and box office) with the B movie heist flick *The Bank Job* (\$29.95; Lionsgate). It's the sort of flick you Netflix or catch on cable and say, "Hey, that wasn't bad!" *Reprise* (\$29.99; Miramax) is more of a genuine find, with two buddies struggling to remain friends (both novelists) as one becomes famous and the other just continues to struggle. Sarah Palin...I mean Tina Fey stars in the mediocre comedy *Baby Mama* (\$29.98; Universal) -- but what does she care when she's still got *30 Rock? Heckler* (\$19.99; Echo Bridge) is a comedy documentary that couldn't be funny if it tried. Get off the stage! You suck! My dead grandmother is funnier than you! Actually, it's a pretty amusing look at comedians and how they deal with hecklers, featuring everyone from Jamie Kennedy to Bill Maher, Lewis Black and Kathy Griffin. *We Are Together* (\$19.98; Palm) is a documentary about the kids in an orphanage who find consolation and joy by performing in their Agape Choir. Look for the heart-tugging feature film any minute now. Less sweet is VHI's *Last Days Of Left Eye* (\$19.97; Anchor Bay), which features footage from the last days of TLC singer Lisa Lopez. And dying won't stop her: she's got a new CD out soon. Finally, there's *The Life and Times of Mr. Perfect* (\$29.95; WWE), which contains a 90 minute documentary on the pro wrestler and 10 complete matches.

So tell me, any recent TV shows break your heart by falling apart in quality?

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Milch didn't "drop" Deadwood. HBO did. So Milch went on to do something else. Whether you liked it or not, at least get your facts straight.

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[peachesmahoney](#) [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of peachesmahoney](#) [permalink](#)

Sorry but I disagree with Grey's Anatomy. That show fell apart the minute Meredith "died" in the ferry boat crash. Addison McBeal or Private Practice might have been the final bullet but GA was already in the toilet.

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Great comments! JJ Abrams does indeed have a horrible track record.

How The West Was Won -- very funny. Maybe the subtitles read How The West Was Lost for the indigenous Americans already living there when "settlers" showed up.

Star Trek -- I know people who can chart the rise and fall of the multiple spin-offs by when ST:TNG ended and the best writers migrated to DS9 and elsewhere. Lots of lost opportunities and too many shows at once.

The Jeffersons is definitely one of the most successful spin-offs of all time and I have a personal

weakness/fondness for Marla Gibbs. Of course, it and Maude and Mike & Gloria and Good Times are a reason All in the Family fell apart.

Firefly --A very fun show in its own right, but of course it meant the last two seasons of Buffy the Vampire Slayer (one of my favorite shows of all time) completely sucked.

BSG -- If you have a fondness for the original (I didn't) then of course it's wackily different. No, Smallville was never great or even good but it was okay for about a season and a half (roughly season two through mid 3) and those days are long gone.

The Wire -- The fourth season was so unbelievably brilliant that I don't think the fifth season could do anything but suffer in comparison. And Generation Kill didn't help. That said, the fifth season was indeed a very solid finale to a great, great series.

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 [mredder4](#) [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of mredder4](#) [permalink](#)

JJ Abrams is now the undisputed ruler of Abandonmyhitshowitruinistan. He dropped his involvement in Alias, one of the best serialized dramas to come along, as he prepped his new hit, Lost. Alias soon fell into a repetitive cycle of wackier and wackier plot twists, which was disappointing on a show that had previously handled such ideas with seriousness. Then the same thing happened to LOST, as the reins were handed over to the producing team while JJ Abrams went off to produce and direct Mission Impossible 3. The lure of the movie business was not to be denied. Now he's back with Fringe, which I expect might have one or two good seasons in it before his involvement drops again (He's reviving the Star Trek movie franchise, after all) and another one of Abrams' television creations dies a slow death.

Basically, if a show is being produced or written or directed by JJ Abrams, no matter how intriguing the concept (a la Fringe), I refuse to even watch it, because it's only setting myself up for disappointment later.

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 [MsLiz](#) [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of MsLiz](#) [permalink](#)

"How the West Was Won" thrilled me as a child. The music, the raft ride, the thieves in the cave, Debbie Reynolds, James Stewart, Thelma Ritter, and more. I watch it on television occasionally, but it sounds like the modern technology will make it better than the best movie house in town could do in the early 1960s.

It's probably politically incorrect now, though. Oh well. I guess the natives would call it How the West Was Lost.

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 [Shawn828](#) [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of Shawn828](#) [permalink](#)

Star Trek DS9 did the same thing in it's last season. Story lines were all over the place for half of it, then when it finally got focused it missed some great opportunities for new direction. They never really exploited Cisco's position as a religious figure. There were a number of directions to go with that.

Another was the show "Girlfriends", which seemed to lose direction after the departure of Jill Marie Jones as the writers sought to produce a new chemistry rather than have it thought out in advance. Sloppy righting and story lines lost audience.

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2nd best spinoff--The Jeffersons!

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It's hard for me to find shows that lost there mojo since most of the ones I like get canceled first season. FIREFLY is the most egregious of those I felt were top quality and never made it while reality crud gets the pass all the time.

BUT

LOST lost it's quality and when the producers and writers admitted they were making it up WHILE the show was being filmed, well that shows they really had no idea of what to do. The drop in ratings was very good proof of this.

I realize this goes against the grain (and I hope you don't think lesser of me for it) but I hate Battlestar Crichton. Really I did. It personified the words....Space Opera to a "T".

It SHOULD have been called something else. It had nothing in common with the original BSG. I was jazzed when they announced it's return even if Ronald (The Cooler) Moore was at the helm. The show was so easy to pick apart that it was like watching Dick Cheney "hunt" birds.

Smallville? Was it ever great? It was watchable and even the arrival of Supergirl didn't make it any worse OR better, just sort of.....eh.

Baby Mama? AWFUL.

Left Eye was sad. Sometimes the behind the scenes stories are nowhere near what one might imagine a star's life to be.

Cartoons? Sorry but nothing matches the originals. Not worth buying the new ones in my purely humble opinion.

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transistor33 See Profile I'm a Fan of transistor33 permalink

Lost teetered on the edge of completely falling apart (or was it just too many obscure references and easter eggs that distracted them?...), but I guess that's why last season really got me excited about it again.

Ditto on Battlestar Galactica, and I think you could say Weeds may have suffered from the same fate. But I have to disagree with you on the Wire. Fifth season was great, and a fitting end to an ongoing story.

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