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## Michael Giltz

Freelance writer and raconteur  
Posted: June 11, 2010 07:59 PM

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# Breaking Bad's Bryan Cranston on Season Finale

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The best show on TV? Right now, it's unquestionably *Breaking Bad*, the AMC drama about a high school chemistry teacher who starts cooking up crystal meth when he discovers he has cancer and may not be able to provide for his family. The Season Three finale is Sunday night at 10 p.m. and actor [Bryan Cranston](#) is relishing the critical success of the series.

Not many actors have been in two hit TV shows (Cranston was an Emmy nominee of course for the groundbreaking sitcom *Malcolm in the Middle*). Even fewer have been in a hit sitcom and a hit drama. But perhaps only Ed Asner (with *The Mary Tyler Moore*

*Show* and *Lou Grant*) has previously been in a sitcom and drama that were both so critically acclaimed. For Cranston, who worked steadily for 20 years before finally getting his big break on *Malcolm*, they are literally the roles of a lifetime.

"It was a stroke of luck - twice - so I'm just very fortunate and always recognize that fact," says the 54 year old actor. "Who knows where it's going to take me from here? This may be the lead line in my obituary and if it is, that's fine by me."

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For a man who emphasizes repeatedly that it all begins with the writing, he was clear before even landing the role that *Breaking Bad* was the perfect follow-up to the broad comedy of the hapless, fear-driven Hal.

"I knew it when I read the script that it was going to be a special show," says Cranston. "I *knew* it. I didn't know it was going to be successful; no one knows that. But I knew it was going to be good."

But *Breaking Bad* has likely exceeded even his expectations. For two years in a row, Cranston has won the Emmy for Best Actor, winning out over Jon Hamm for AMC's *Mad Men* (winner of Best Drama of course), Michael C. Hall for *Dexter* and numerous others (actors and shows he cites as examples of quality TV). For years, Cranston wasn't even nominated for his work on *Malcolm* until its creator touted his work at the Emmys itself and he joked repeatedly about the empty shelf space reserved for his statues. Now, that shelf space is filling up.

"The standard line is that it's an honor just to be nominated," says Cranston. "That may be, but it's a lot more fun to win."

And his career is a lot more fun, too. Cranston has more than **100 credits on IMDB**, but the wild success of *Malcolm* didn't bring him the added oomph he deserved to snag bigger and better roles in film. (When someone is good in a comedy, people say, "Oh, they're funny." When someone is good in a drama, they say, "Oh, they can act.")

That's finally changed with *Breaking Bad*. Cranston has a string of roles in prominent films, including *Love Ranch* (about the first legal brothel), a World War II film about the Tuskegee airmen overseen by George Lucas, the future summer blockbuster *John Carter Of Mars* (starring Taylor Kitsch of another great TV show, *Friday Night Lights*) and *Larry Crowne*, which is written and directed and stars Tom Hanks, who has championed Cranston via projects like *From The Earth To The Moon* to *Saving Private Ryan* to *That Thing You Do!*

"It's a dramedy and I am an author and the husband of Julia Roberts. That's a nice role to have. I can think of very few roles I'd rather have," says Cranston. It's nice unless Larry Crowne (the Hanks character, an unemployed businessman who goes back to college) steals away your gal, right?

"Well, when he's writing his own movie, he does have the tendency to make himself the star," jokes Cranston in mock indignation.

So the success and growing recognition is sweet. But it wouldn't be so much fun if the show weren't so good. It began with an outrageous, catchy premise: high school chem teacher turned drug dealer. And for three seasons, *Breaking Bad* has deepened that premise and crafted surprising people remarkably well, including Cranston and his drug addict sidekick Aaron Paul (rightly nominated for an Emmy as well last year for his exceptional work). It was created by Vince Gilligan, a major contributor to *The X-Files*, including an episode called "Drive" back in 1998 that Cranston appeared in.

Every character -- from Cranston's accountant wife to his DEA brother-in-law to Giancarlo Esposito's chillingly self-possessed drug lord -- has become more and more fascinating. And Cranston's Walter H. White has grown from a man acting in desperation to a sometimes ruthless operator we're not even sure we should still like. It's as if we met Tony Soprano *before* he became a gangster and watched his descent. Here's a look at the first scene of the pilot episode.

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Cranston loves the ambiguity of the show and even questions my suggestion that the premise was outrageous.

"I don't know if the premise is that outlandish," he says. "We see examples of this in the news all the time. How many times do we see a news report where the neighbor went berserk and kills? And the neighbor says, 'He was so quiet and nice and I can't believe it. He's the last person I would expect to be a counterfeiter' or whatever."

"I think we assume -- because of how most people live their lives -- we assume that everyone else is pretty much the same. We have *no idea* what goes on behind closed doors. And that's what is really interesting and intriguing about the whole thing."

And viewers have no idea week to week what to expect on *Breaking Bad*. One outstanding episode this season, "Fly," featured almost nothing but Cranston and Paul in a meth lab trying to kill a fly that had snuck into their room. It was bold and unconventional but also wildly suspenseful as we wondered whether Cranston's character would spill the beans about a secret that was haunting him. His wife (Anna Gunn of *Deadwood*) has gone from an unsuspecting spouse to a woman determined to divorce him to now pushing to take over the accounting so he doesn't get caught laundering money.

"I was really happy to see this season Anna Gunn's character really be fleshed out and realized," says Cranston. "It pointed out to me how important her character is to the anchor of this show. We all try to function as the foundation of *Breaking Bad*."

Then of course there's Cranston himself, who has relished moments like confronting a drug dealer trying to horn in on his territory to the scene where his wife spins an elaborate lie (a funny scene given weight when he asks her where she came up with it and she responds stinging that she learned from the best) to a show-stopping moment last season where he watches a young woman die. Wasn't it exciting to do that, as an actor?

"Yes and at the same time it's horrifying," says Cranston. "I look at this little girl who is dying and you can't help but personalize it and I think of my daughter dying and that's when it brought me to tears and shame and regret and finally acceptance. I just went through so many emotions at that point and the final one is 'move on, let it go.'"

But one of the hallmarks of the show is consequences. You can't just move on from your bad actions because every deed has repercussions. Every single one. Every lie, every cover-up, every attempt to appease one person rebounds in painful and unexpected ways. It's brilliant and funny and moving and Cranston understands perfectly when I say I want the series to end soon. Not because the show is close to running out of creativity, but just the opposite: the only thing harder than creating a great TV show is ending it well. Very few TV shows manage to do it. But the people on *Breaking Bad* seem keen to accomplish that feat. Creator Gilligan initially said he imagined the show should end at four seasons. But since the first season was only seven episodes long, he can be excused for not sticking to that target. Cranston supports the idea 100 percent when I say five seasons and out.

"I think it's going to be something like that. I really do," says Cranston, who mentions that season four won't begin filming until January of 2011 and may air during the summer. "All of us have expressed an interest in protecting the integrity of the show and the rule that we established that here's a man who is going to be dead within a year and a half to two years. And I can pretty much guarantee and I am

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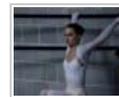


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honestly telling you this because I don't know how it's going to end and I haven't asked [Vince Gilligan] and I don't want to know, it will probably end with me dying in some way, to stay true. I would certainly think that is the way to go.

"I think there are enough stories to tell and enough time before the complete transformation of this character and others to tell this story in five seasons. I think it's legitimate without overstaying our welcome. Beyond five, *possibly* six but no more than that. Then there's the sense of commerce; you want to be good to the people who pay you to be here and that's AMC and Sony. There will be discussions as to when we should let it go. I think Vince and I would convince them it's time to let go so that we can assure that we can look back and be proud of all the seasons that we did as a journey and needing all of them and not stay a moment longer than we should."

If you're already watching *Breaking Bad*, you are certainly primed for the season finale. If you haven't watched the show, you've got 33 terrific episodes to dive into. You can Netflix or purchase **seasons one and two on DVD** and purchase season three on iTunes or wait for it to come out later. (It's not on Hulu yet.) With all the ways of watching TV, you never have to feel a serialized drama has passed you by. Don't let this one: it ranks with *The Wire* as an absolute peak of TV drama from the past 10 years.

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER

**TequilaMockingbird** 07:31 PM on 6/14/2010  
656 Fans



Already can't wait until next season.. Best Show on TV..

well.. at least there is True Blood to tide me over..

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**Indiegirl99** 04:43 PM on 6/14/2010

37 Fans

This is a must see show. Every episode is amazingly written and acted, I can not wait to see what happens next. I don't know how I am going to wait until next Summer to see the next season. My only problem with the show (if you can call it that) is that every time I tell some one about the premise of the show, no one seems to want to give it a chance, they hear the word meth and that's it. They don't know what they are missing out on.

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**aaaarrggg** 01:35 PM on 6/14/2010

13 Fans

Did I see that right? Next season won't start until NEXT SUMMER?

If there is a problem with this show its the LOOOONNNGGG wait times for the next season to start...

**kiki800** 04:54 PM on 6/14/2010

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I know, but if it keeps the show on, I can wait. At least it isn't 18 months like The Sopranos was getting to be. I read that each show cost \$3 million to shoot. On location. Time magazine just had a good article about it.

Looking forward to Rubicon, and other shows in between (True Blood, Drop Dead Diva, etc.). No Mad Men.

Haven't seen the full finale, but the first 15-20 minutes were great. Loved that they showed Skyler and Walt moving into their house.

Ditto to momca54's comment about Bryan Cranston.

**HUFFPOST SUPER USER**

**momcat54** 01:08 PM on 6/14/2010

184 Fans



It has been fascinating to watch Walter's transformation. Brian Cranston has made a memorable character and deserves every accolade he has received.

**aquaman2008** 10:53 AM on 6/14/2010

1 Fans

I would like to thank Mr. Cranston for his outstanding work on Breaking Bad. I have been a fan of this show from season 1, episode 1. Excellent work. Keep up the good work Mr. Cranston.

By the way, Malcolm in the middle was anything but groundbreaking. It was the carbon copy of a groundbreaking original "Married with Children "

Thanks.

**Wickywoo** 10:21 AM on 6/14/2010

58 Fans

Please don't forget that the show is also on Blu-ray, and support getting more dramas in that format, the show looks and sounds amazing in high def

**Carpenterpoetzz** 10:09 AM on 6/14/2010

1 Fans

Breaking Bad is the best thing on TV. It forces people to think about morality in a way that no other show does. This strikes home when you realize that you are rooting for, and empathize with a meth dealer. The world of meth isn't sanitized, and the characters that Cranston and Paul deal with are very true to real life. It brings back feelings that I haven't felt for 20 odd years, from fear to the exhilarating nose burn, you just have to trust me on that. The fact that you can go from laughing to cringing in an hour and feel the need for a shower after is only possible, because of great writing and acting. I do agree with others about the authors oversight of Aaron Paul, who is fantastic as

Jesse Pinkman. I can't say enough good things about this show, and while I'll be sad to see it go, I am glad to hear that the plan is to have it come to final conclusion while it is still strong.

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**Michael Giltz** 09:15 PM on 6/14/2010  
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I agree Aaron Paul is fantastic, as is the entire cast. I actually had more in but cut it because the post was so long. I unintentionally cut out my first reference to Aaron, which is why he's just referred to as "Paul" towards the bottom. My initial ref to him did indeed rave and I'm gonna put it back in to clarify who I'm referring to. I'd love to profile him too, but the piece was focused on Cranston.

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**john frodo** 10:02 AM on 6/14/2010

174 Fans



I describe to the ignorant, that Breaking Bad is a cross between McGyver and The Sopranos.

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**john frodo** 10:00 AM on 6/14/2010

174 Fans



Breaking Bad rocks, blue rocks.

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**deezus** 09:05 AM on 6/14/2010

58 Fans

The finale was great, can't wait for next season!

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**andrewwalker** 06:28 AM on 6/14/2010

0 Fans

This is a wonderful opinion. The things mentioned are great and needs to be appreciated by everyone..  
Budget Travel

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**Duke1225** 03:59 AM on 6/14/2010  
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This show is ridiculously good. It's truly great art.

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**gypsysailor** 02:35 AM on 6/14/2010

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I picked up on this show about 1/3 the way into the first season. I still have not seen the first 3 episodes and that will soon change. I can say this about the show and real life; in real life you never know what the unintended consequences might be, while in the show, you often see what they can be.

Great Show, great acting, only one problem. What the recipe for the Blue Crystal? Just kidding.

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EvenThen 12:22 AM on 6/14/2010



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>>>>Cranston has a string of roles in prominent films, including Love Ranch (about the first legal brothel), a World War II film about the Tuskegee airmen overseen by George Lucas, the future summer blockbuster John Carter Of Mars (starring Taylor Kitsch of another great TV show, Friday Night Lights) and Larry Crowne, which is written and directed and stars Tom Hanks, who has championed Cranston via projects like From The Earth To The Moon to Saving Private Ryan to That Thing You Do!

Then of course there was his Seinfeld bit - as Dr. Tim Whatley. Man that was funny!!

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EvenThen 12:15 AM on 6/14/2010



91 Fans

Breaking Bad is amazing. Every season has been a wow. Brilliant!

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