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SURFING THE WAVES OF POPULAR CULTURE
BY MICHAEL GILTZ & FRIENDS

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Fall TV Roundup

Tonight is the debut of "30 Rock" and the John Lithgow comedy, the last of the significant fall premieres. (I haven't seen advances.) Every network has already made a flurry of changes, but I'll still take a moment to give my rundown.

NEW SHOWS YOU SHOULD WATCH:

1. Friday Night Lights -- the second episode did everything I hoped for: it began at Sunday service (where a new football coach would have to appear and which made emotional sense since the local star quarterback had just been paralyzed in a terrible on-field accident). And the show ended with the kickoff of the Friday night game, meaning they're not wedded to showing the actual games. What matters are the characters and it's a great mix, from the paralyzed quarterback and his girlfriend, to the deer-in-the-headlights replacement, the drunk player, the brash talking black kid (the closest to a cliché on the show but hopefully he'll deepen), the coach who fears for his job (played by Kyle Chandler in the role of his career) and the constant din of the townsfolk who offer advice everywhere he turns. This is nuanced, gripping, emotional, subtle and wonderful stuff. And again, it's nice to see people who pray appear on TV who aren't freaks or polygamists or hypocrites. This show is in ratings trouble so the sooner you start watching the better. NBC would be foolish to dump this one.
2. Heroes -- the last thing I wanted was another serialized drama in my life (but are serialized dramas really any more of a commitment than, say, "Grey's Anatomy?"). But this one is goofy fun. Long term, I'm worried about them teasing this out or wondering if they'll have a new overall adventure each season or what. In short, I have no idea what's going on but all the characters (except the cartoonist who can paint the future) are interesting. I'd like to stop watching, but can't.
3. The Nine -- only seen one episode, but I thought the pilot was great. Lots of good characters. As long as they don't dwell in the past (what

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