



Test-driving television's rookies



GROUP COMMENTARY

With brand-new television shows up and running, either making a splash or drowning in the first few months of their seasons, it's only appropriate that us well-schooled Gateway writers provide you with an up-to-date critique of which programs are worth watching, and which ones you should flip past.

MICHAEL LAROCQUE

Best: Dexter

The eponymous anti-hero of this hour-long drama is a serial killer who daylight as a blood-splatter expert for the Miami PD. Raised by a cop who recognized his sociopathic tendencies, Dexter has disciplined himself to only kill criminals who have managed to avoid justice, all the while hiding his emotionless bloodlust from his co-workers. Funny, compelling and a truly unique take on a tiring genre of CSI-esque forensic dramas, this serial-mystery is my bet to be the next cable TV hit. While Canadian viewers may need to wait for the first season DVD or find some alternative method (ahem) to enjoy this show, watching a crime drama through the eyes of a killer is easily pleasurable enough to spare the money—or the bandwidth.

Worst: The Nine

I was surprised that *The Nine* was picked up for a full season so quickly; I committed myself to four episodes, and even being someone who truly wanted to like this show, I had to pull the plug. Do we need another

uber-mystery series on TV? The run-up to its premier suggested *The Nine* held all the mystery and suspense of *Lost*, but quickly reveals that the bank-robbery premise was only a launching point for a plodding character drama that leaves you wishing more of them were shot during the heist. While a few well-acted parts give *The Nine* a certain charm, its conspicuous attempts at creating the "tune in next time" feeling enjoyed by *Lost* prevents the program from really going anywhere.

DANIEL KASZOR

Best: Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip

With all due respect to *Heroes*, I'm still going to say that *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip* is the best new show of the season. Sure, it stumbled a bit during its first few episodes, and it hasn't reached the level of "OMG teh Awesome" that many people seemed to expect from it, but it's still the most consistently good new show on television. Honourable mention goes to the before referred to *Heroes*, which loses points simply because it has too much going on at once.

Worst: Everything Else

Um, all the shows that aren't *Heroes* and *Studio 60*? Seriously, they suck. There are a few interesting ideas (such as *The Nine*, though that seems unwatchable unless you buy it on DVD), but on the whole, everything kind of blows. Did we really need two shows about kidnapping, one of which has a main character named Napp? Really though, most of the new dramas are just terribly mediocre. The true worst show of the new season is that one starring the guy who played Raymond's brother. Not that I've watched a full episode, but it always seems to be on whenever I flip to Fox to watch the *OC*, and it makes

According to Jim seem like quality entertainment.

KRISTINA DE GUZMAN

Best: The OC

Even though *The OC* technically isn't a new show, the degree to which it's improved this season makes it a whole new series. It's actually entertaining and funny now, which is a far cry from the awfulness that it has quickly become over the last few years.

Now that Marissa (Micha Barton) is gone, I can happily watch Benjamin McKenzie (Ryan), who's always been good, despite his horrible pairing with her; he plays the broody loner so well. Unlike Barton, Autumn Reeser (Taylor) can act. Taylor's an interesting character while Marissa was just a drag to watch. Melinda Clarke continues to play one of the best love-to-hate bitches on television, and occasionally we see there's more to Julie than being a one-note attention seeker.

The show isn't perfect (for example, we still have to deal with Seth and Summer, played by the overrated Adam Brody and Rachel Bilson), but really, *The OC* is no longer unsalvageable. It took just one episode for me to give it another chance, sucking me right back into the drama.

Worst: Friday Night Lights

I've heard that you don't have to be a football fan (which I'm not) to like *Friday Night Lights*, but even with the focus on the characters and their families, I still couldn't get into this show. Somehow, *Friday Night Lights* feels like it has a really low budget, and the direction seems amateur. Great acting and storytelling can easily overshadow such problems, but unfortunately, this isn't the case with FNL. The acting is mediocre and, at times, painful to watch. They

might as well have gotten some of the actors off of *Laguna Beach*, because that's how bad some of them are. I had a hard time sitting through an entire episode and caring about any of the characters, despite some of their serious problems (like alcoholism and drug abuse). Aside from the football game scenes, I felt the characters were in their own little bubble, giving the show a really disjointed atmosphere. In short, don't watch this show unless you're prepared to be bored right out of your mind.

RYAN HEISE

Best: 30 Rock

Besides watching *SportsCentre* six times a day, I've become quite partial to NBC's *30 Rock*. It has a great ensemble cast headed up by Alec Baldwin and Tina Fey of *SNL* fame. The series essentially parodies the behind-the-scenes operations of a sketch comedy show, paying little to no attention to the fictional show within a show. Surprisingly, Baldwin has excellent comedic timing and really delivers in his pseudo-Lorne Michaels role. *30 Rock* also fits in nicely to NBC's newly revised Must See TV along with the incomparable *The Office*, *My Name is Earl* and the only non-emo Zach Braff project, *Scrubs*.

Worst: Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip

Picking the worst TV show of the new season is like picking the person you want to kick you in the balls: in the end, they're all equally bad. But ignoring anything with "dancing" or "stars" in the title, I'd have to say *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip*, not because I only have room for one show about fictional sketch comedy in my heart, but because I absolutely despise Matthew Perry. If this were being written in 1994, I would probably say that *Friends*

is the worst new show for the same reason. All Matthew Perry was good for in *Friends* was split second one-liners that fade from memory just as fast. He seems to have revisited his role nicely for *Studio 60*.

JOEL TIEDEMANN

Best: Daybreak

Daybreak is definitely the best new series on television this season. This riveting drama follows detective Brett Hopper as he relives the same day over and over again, each time with new twists. Each day he is accused of murdering a high-profile attorney, and each day he cleverly attempts new ways to evade the police and the mob, all the while trying to prove his innocence. Although the detective has the chance to relive one day repeatedly, all the physical wounds he received the previous day stay with him as the new day breaks. This show will definitely have you waiting until the next week to see what will happen next.

Worst: Heroes

I honestly can't figure out how the new series *Heroes* made it past the pilot stage. This show is basically X-Men off of steroids. A bunch of ordinary people suddenly discover that they have some sort of extraordinary abilities, and although these people come from various parts of the globe, it has been suggested to viewers that all of the mutants will be united in a mission to save a, wait for it, cheerleader. That's right, an entire series based on average, everyday people with strange powers coming together to save a blonde, teenage cheerleader. Is it just me, or are writers, producers and networks starting to run out of ideas? Trust me, read your textbooks rather than wasting time on this show.