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A mob boss in therapy. An experimental, violent prison unit. The death of an American city, as seen through a complex police investigation. A lawless frontier town trying to talk its way into the United States. A corrupt cop who rules his precinct like a warlord. The survivors of a plane crash trying to make sense of their disturbing new island home. A high school girl by day, monster fighter by night. A spy who never sleeps. A space odyssey inspired by 9/11. An embattled high school football coach. A polished ad exec with a secret. A chemistry teacher turned drug lord.

These are the subjects of 12 shows that started a revolution in TV drama: *The Sopranos*. *Oz*. *The Wire*. *Deadwood*. *The Shield*. *Lost*. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. *24*. *Battlestar Galactica*. *Friday Night Lights*. *Mad Men*. *Breaking Bad*.

These 12 shows, and the many more they made possible, ushered in a new golden age of television — one that made people take the medium more seriously than ever before. Alan Sepinwall became a TV critic right before this creative revolution began, was there to chronicle this incredible moment in pop culture history, and along the way “changed the nature of television criticism,” according to Slate. *The Revolution Was Televised* is the story of these 12 shows, as told by Sepinwall and the people who made them, including David Chase, David Simon, David Milch, Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse, Vince Gilligan and more.

The Revolution Was Televised: The Cops, Crooks, Slingers and Slayers Who Changed TV Drama Forever Details

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Bucko says

I didn't read all of this book, only the chapters covering the shows I had watched.

Overall, I found it quite enjoyable. There are a lot of great stories and details about the creation/evolution of these shows. If you are a die-hard fan of a particular show, there may not be a lot of new material here (I found the *Mad Men* and *Buffy* chapters a trifle thin, but those seem to be the only chapters where the author was unable to obtain new interviews with the head creatives. Damn you Weiner and Whedon!), but in total, this is a great collection of behind-the-scenes info on some of the best TV shows ever.

Update 2016: Read several more chapters because I watched many more TV shows!

Sistermagpie says

I love reading (and writing) about good television, and thoroughly enjoyed Alan Sepinwall's doing the same. One of the best things I can say about these essays--one for each show he focuses on--is that I wanted pretty much all of them to be longer. I learned a lot about how each show came to be on and off the air (though of course there are conflicting accounts depending on who you ask in many cases). It confirms the vague impression I've had of current TV that the reason so many amazing shows got on the air was mostly due to networks taking risks on creators with real passion for what they were doing. It's pretty inspiring to think that letting go of the need for big ratings across the board really can inspire fantastic work for small audiences.

I'm sure many would argue with the shows Sepinwall chooses over others, and they would probably have a very good argument there, but the shows here often seem to be chosen not so much because they're "the best ever" (though obviously in some cases the author thinks they are) but because they represented something new in what they were doing that opened the door for more. *The Shield*, for instance, is one of the shows I hadn't actually watched. The essay on that show isn't so much about the main character being a dangerous antihero (of which we already had plenty) but about how that was the show that led the way for basic cable to try to be more like HBO and how wonderful that goal was.

I fully admit I tend to agree with AS that we're living in an amazing age of TV, so I'm more than happy to listen to him give his take on that.

Alfredo says

I purchased this e-book from Amazon after hearing good comments about it on the NPR podcast <https://www.facebook.com/pchh?fref=ts> and I am glad I did.

This book covers the creation, development, and execution of several of the seminal television series of the last 8 years. The stories are fascinating and they give the reader a better idea of how the television production business is so often based on luck.

The book covers different network and cable shows from Buffy The Vampire Slayer, Lost and 24 to Breaking Bad and Mad Men, and some pay cable classics like The Sopranos, and The Wire.

The author, Alan Sepinwall, is obviously very knowledgeable of the industry and has access to some of the major players. I especially enjoyed the chapters on Mad Men, Buffy, and 24 and how novice writers and producers managed to get their vision onto our TV screens.

This book is self-published, but don't let that make you believe it is not well researched and extremely well written. I highly recommend it if you love TV.

John Cooper says

For several years, Alan Sepinwall's blog, first at the New Jersey Star Ledger and then at Hitfix.com, has been the site I visit right after watching an intense episode of my favorite serial drama. Sepinwall practically invented the practice of reviewing individual episodes of a TV series, an invaluable service in an era when television shows pack a level of depth and ambiguity that only movies used to have. In this book, he visits a dozen series that expanded how television approaches the storytelling form: Oz, The Sopranos, The Wire, Deadwood, The Shield, Lost, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, 24, Battlestar Galactica, Friday Night Lights, Mad Men, and Breaking Bad. He talks with the producers and writers of each show to get insights about the creative process that went into them and the particular challenges, both artistic and professional, that they solved (or didn't). If you were a fan of any of these shows, you'll enjoy revisiting them through this particular lens, and you'll want to start watching the ones you missed.

Sepinwall's writing here is smoother and even more enjoyable than the off-the-cuff (although still literate and engaging) work he does for the blog. I was pleased to learn that he's not only a great blogger, he's a good writer, period, and whenever his next book comes out, I'll read it—even if it's not about TV.

Diane says

This is an excellent analysis of twelve shows that ushered in the new golden age of television that we are currently enjoying.

I've been reading Alan Sepinwall's columns for several years and was thrilled he'd written a book about some of my favorite TV shows, including The Wire, The Sopranos, Deadwood, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Mad Men, Lost, Battlestar Galactica and Friday Night Lights. Other shows discussed in the book are Oz, The Shield, 24 and Breaking Bad, in addition to a prologue that lists earlier shows that challenged networks and audiences long before David Chase wrote the first episode of The Sopranos.

If you're a fan of any of those shows listed above, you would probably find this book interesting. Sepinwall provides a back story for each show, interviewing the creators and network executives to describe how the show initially got made and its production process. He also discusses highlights from each show and what

made it so unique and great.

A key point made by several writers and producers is that dramas are flourishing on television partly because Hollywood has all but abandoned them: "Where once there had been blockbusters, art films, and a large swath of movies in between — many of that last group geared toward adults — the 21st century slowly saw the extinction of the middle-class movie. If a film couldn't either be made on the cheap or guarantee an opening weekend of \$50 million or more, it was out. As *Sopranos* creator David Chase puts it, 'Movies went from something really interesting to what we have now.'"

This book made me excited again for shows I haven't watched in years, and interested in some that I haven't yet seen.

Kurt says

This is a book that does exactly what it promises to do: Sepinwall devotes a chapter apiece to some of the innovative dramas that changed the way that television engaged with the public in the new millenium. Each chapter works as a standalone piece - if you just want Sepinwall's take on *Buffy* or *Breaking Bad*, you don't have to read the rest of the book - but certain themes do develop in the course of the book. *The Shield* brought a complex antihero to cable networks, but only after HBO blazed a trail with *Oz* and *The Sopranos*, for example. Sepinwall explores the way that premium channels like HBO and Showtime allowed writers to develop storytelling rhythms that didn't depend on hitting dramatic moments in time for commercials, and the way that the rise of DVD collections made it feasible for even mainstream networks to commit to serialization with shows like *Lost* (the idea there, more or less, is that while soap operas with devoted fan bases could tell stories over long periods of time, primetime television was much more focused on procedural dramas where a new viewer could enjoy a one-episode story without needing the background. When consumers began purchasing DVDs to binge-watch a series, then suddenly it became alright for, say, *The Wire* to be kind of incomprehensible for four episodes, or for *Lost* to take multiple seasons to resolve certain character arcs.). Each chapter is full of interviews with the creators themselves, often with surprises (wait, the writers take the blame for *Friday Night Lights*' second-season Tyra-Landry murder story, which was such a colossal misfire that viewers just assumed it came from network interference?).

You probably already know if you want to read this book. You probably read the title and hoped to get a well-respected television critic telling incisive and adoring stories about the shows he loves. The only real question is whether or not he executes his promise well, and I can assure you that he does. This isn't a book that will create fans out of people who refuse to watch television, but it's a joyful virtual fan club meeting for those of us who appreciate how compelling and meaningful these groundbreaking shows can be.

Jamie says

A solid, largely interesting look at the context and impact of a handful of shows I respect (*The Wire*, *Deadwood*, *The Sopranos*, *Battlestar Galactica*), a handful of shows I like well enough (*Friday Night Lights*, *Breaking Bad*, *24*), a handful of shows that, for whatever reasons, rank somewhere on the scale of dislike to indifference (*Mad Men*, *Lost*, *Buffy*), one show of which I had no prior knowledge (*Oz*), and one show I love heart and soul (*The Shield*).

Not that it's 1-for-12 though. (Or 4-for-12, or 8-for-12.) Even the dramas that might not interest me in and of themselves, it's interesting to learn their time and place and context— in other words, to learn the 110 reasons they should never, ever have been created, produced, aired, or watched. The recurring theme of the book: how every success in it was a fluke at best and more accurately, the straight-up defiance of all convention and logic. Ron Moore of *Battlestar Galactica*, the *Battlestar* that would stand less of a chance of getting made today than ten years ago, closes out the final chapter with this observation: “You can almost guarantee that the success story of the next great show will be one of ‘Nobody believes in us, the network hated it, it tested like shit, they all wanted to cancel it, and sure enough, it became an enormous hit.’” Over and over again.

Happy accidents, misbegotten experiments, I don't care. I'll take 'em all.

Some stray thoughts:

- Here's my favorite anecdote (of course): the mind-blower over the completely different *Shield* we almost got because Kevin Reilly at FX wanted Walton Goggins fired after the pilot. “[Shawn] Ryan argued successfully for his guy, and by the time Season 5 ended with [goddamn it —*Jamie's note*] (view spoiler), Goggins had more than justified his boss's faith. As a result, the final two seasons didn't need a Very Special Guest Star: with Goggins now playing at Chiklis's level, there was no conflict the show could create that would be bigger, or hit harder, than Vic vs. Shane, mentor against protégé, brother against brother.” And this from the show that, Sepinwall says in the next paragraph, “is not only lacking a sore-thumb season; it's the only one of the great millennial dramas whose last season many fans would be likely to name as the show's best.”
- (Eight years later, of course, John Landgraf of FX and everyone of FX and everybody involved in the show and everybody watching the show and even Elmore Leonard himself is resurrecting Boyd from the pilot because there's just no way they're doing *Justified* without Walton Goggins. Redemption.)
- Vic Mackey and Jack Bauer: it tickles me how they get branded as Vic the corrupt cop and Jack the American hero. Um, let's compare some spreadsheets here.
- On *Battlestar*, the line that made me laugh: the tightrope walk of the studio's concern about darkness and “David and Ron wanting to basically drown babies at every turn.” They were trying to stay true to the tone of the show, “which was going to drown babies. It just was.”
- I really want to see the S1 *Breaking Bad* that AMC deemed had “too much story.” I really want to see any show that AMC deems has too much story.
- (Meaning one of my favorite tweets from Dan Harmon is not only funny but kind of true: “There must be a guy at AMC that stops you after one sentence of your pitch and says, ‘whoa whoa, save some of this for season two!’”)
- This footnote at the end: the thanks to Ted Griffin, who “helped give this book a much better title than he gave his own show, *Terriers*.” *Terriers*, forever.

Jake says

It's a remarkable coincidence that the theme of the television shows Alan Sepinwall chooses to write about for his book is: right people, right place, right time. Sepinwall himself, widely considered one of the best TV critics out there (his reviews are a must-read for me and I'm not in the minority here), certainly lucked out to be at the right place (writing for the NJ Star-Ledger and internet boards just as the net was blowing up) at the right time (the golden age of television). Thus, he is the perfect person to chronicle the late-90s to now revolution of quality television and he does not disappoint. Every show he tracks is laid out for: 1. How it was made (almost all of them by accident), 2. What made it good and, most importantly, 3. What made it *unique* for its time and place. There's a lot of fascinating behind-the-scenes stuff as well as brand new interviews with many of the shows creators that help to place shows in their proper perspective. For example, the David Chase interview for *The Sopranos* really helped to highlight most of the series' aim while putting the controversial ending in a good perspective (even though I still hate it). And while I've never watched *Battlestar Galactica*, Sepinwall's ability to show where the depth of the program is made me want to (on a related note, I skipped through most of the *Lost* chapter as I do someday want to try and watch that show so take that for what it's worth). This is a must own for any fan of the quality television programs of the past decade, as well as any fan of Alan Sepinwall's work. Even if you have not seen these shows, you will understand by the end of the book what makes them great and what their role was in this golden age of TV.

Katie says

It was nearly impossible for me to separate my reactions to the work that Sepinwall did do from what it could have been. It was part of the reason I was a bit underwhelmed by the book, something that emmalita and I share. But I should perhaps back up a little first because Alan Sepinwall did tackle a large mountain of a topic that is going to be at the center of the discussion of what pop culture and television are and can be moving forward.

Full review: <https://faintingviolet.wordpress.com/...>

Joy says

I gave this 4 stars because I've been reading Sepinwall's insightful reviews for years and I'm glad he decided to write a book. I especially liked the chapter on Mad Men, although I didn't learn much new since I'm such a big fan. I haven't watched all the shows he writes about but I'm thinking of getting Friday Night Lights on DVD now that I know more about it. I also really liked the chapter on The Sopranos (one of my all time favorite shows) and Sepinwall's analysis of the controversial ending. The chapter on The Wire also would encourage me to watch it if I hadn't seen it many times already. All in all, a well written book for TV addicts like me! It would have been even better if he had discussed Rescue Me, Justified, Six Feet Under and Sex and the City, although he mentioned them briefly.

Alec says

At the end of April, I took a joyous vacation to the Big Island of Hawaii with my family. After 9 days of golf, snorkeling, Mai Tais and a dangerous lack of consonant variety, we were congratulating ourselves for going the whole trip without once turning on the TV. We reveled in our collective sophistication and sense of adventure...then I paused, and went back to reading my book about television.

Alan Sepinwall is a TV critic whose articles I have read and enjoyed for years and *The Revolution of Televised* is his analysis of 12 shows that, as the title implies, changed television drama...forever. These shows are *The Sopranos*, *Oz*, *The Wire*, *Deadwood*, *The Shield*, *Lost*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *24*, *Battlestar Gallactica*, *Friday Night Lights*, *Mad Men* and *Breaking Bad*. Having watched the majority of these shows, reading this book was a lot like looking through an old photo album. The descriptions reminded me where I watched each show and who I was with and triggered a certain nostalgia that goes a long way toward explaining my 5 star rating. It probably didn't hurt that I did most of my reading on a balcony overlooking the Pacific Ocean...with a tropical cocktail in hand. Objectivity was not my strongest trait. Let's just say during this same time I compared the lead singer of Fun to a young Paul McCartney. Yeah.

My most cherished takeaway from the book was an introduction to the show *Deadwood*. For some reason this show had never appealed to me, but after reading Sepinwall describe the character of Al Swearingen in such glowing terms I couldn't help but give it a chance. The next thing I knew, 2 weeks had passed and I had cannonball-ed the whole series. Self control! Regardless, it is now one of my favorite shows. Maybe even my absolute favorite, but that's a discussion for another time. Thanks to this introduction, I'm willing to overlook the perverse exclusion of *The OC* from this exalted list. RIP Marissa. Gone, but not forgotten.

Part of me is embarrassed by how much I enjoy Alan Sepinwall and, by extension, this book. There is something inherently pathetic about feverishly watching a show and then spending hours reading about the show you have just watched. It just seems so incredibly soft. "Hobbies: watching my stories and then reading about watching my stories" just doesn't scream "CEO." I will not apologize. If I wasn't meant to study serialized drama, I would not have been blessed with the ability to sit contentedly for days on end without moving.

This is probably not a 5 star book. If you haven't seen most of the shows, it's probably not even enjoyable, but for those of you who love serialized TV drama as much as I do, this is a must read. Especially if, God forbid, you find yourself in a TV-less paradise and all that real life activity starts giving you the shakes. One quick hit of TV Methadone, by Alan Sepinwall, and you'll be good as new.

mark monday says

in his prologue, Sepinwall discusses antecedents to the more modern shows that have created the most recent Golden Age of Television - the third or fourth such age, I think. the author points out how the foundation for such things as the season-long storyline, dark and ambiguous characterization, creative forms of storytelling, and narratives that exist to challenge rather than to provide comfort were present in such landmark shows as *Hill Street Blues*, *St. Elsewhere*, and *Twin Peaks*. (view spoiler)

. the rest of the book details a good number of the series that - as the cover informs us - "changed tv drama forever." sadly, it appears that some of the minds behind these shows feel like this golden period is over. I wonder if this is true.

chapter 1: the trailblazing show **Oz** and its maverick creator Tom Fontana. I really wish this chapter had gone a bit more in depth about the show itself: its off-kilter similarity to an off-off-off-Broadway production with its staginess and often theatrical acting and of course those little soliloquies; the intensely brutal and nihilistic final season; the tortured plotlines that still moved so much faster than any other shows of its time; the gigantic and constantly changing casts usually separated by ethnicity and often rotating due to one of the highest body counts a show has ever had; etc. that show is a classic. so ugly. so beautiful! (view spoiler)

chapter 2: the big daddy of them all **The Sopranos**. fortunately, Sepinwall spends as much time with the brilliance of the show itself as he does with its maverick creator David Chase. the author argues successfully that the magic ingredient in the narrative is the psychotherapy; without it, the result may have been interesting but hardly original. the psychotherapy and all of the psychodrama in general are what gives it unique appeal and lasting value. that, and a genuinely selfish and mean-spirited psychopath as its lead character. this chapter also spends a good amount of time on that controversial ending. (view spoiler)

chapter 3: that classic educational tool for white people **The Wire**. unsurprisingly, Sepinwall describes the series as a novelistic experience, which is how it has been described for about a decade now. some time is spent with The Wire's maverick creators David Simon & Ed Burns but most of the chapter is all about those novelistic traits and how the series is a portrait of a city and a world rather than being about cops & criminals. no new points are made here but it was still enjoyable reading so much about a show that I still think about regularly. plus some nice mentions: that one conversation consisting solely of "fuck" and, of course, Omar. oh, Omar! man he has to be one of the dreamiest characters ever created for the small screen.(view spoiler)

chapter 4: this is mainly a piece on **Deadwood**'s fascinating maverick creator David Milch. with a lot on the controversy behind the show's non-ending (and one happy spoiler: apparently in real life, George Hearst didn't win. hurrah!) and a little bit on the show's wonderfully original dialogue. as portrayed by the author, Milch is indeed fascinating. formidable guy! although I quite disliked his John from Cincinnati or whatever its called. still, you have to admire a man with vision. such a maverick. (view spoiler)

chapter 5: all about **The Shield** and its "maverick" creator Shawn Ryan. a lot about the channel FX and a little about star Michael Chiklis; would have preferred more about the show itself. but this was still a pretty enjoyable chapter, mainly because Sepinwall seems to be as agog over the show's insane nastiness and its

parade of perversions as viewers were at the time. (view spoiler)

chapter 6: the wonder of **Lost** and its ~~maverick creator Lloyd Braun~~ ~~maverick creator JJ Abrams~~ show-helpers Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof. the chapter gives the show its due, tracing its appeal and successes and challenges on an almost season-by-season basis. some interesting thoughts on how Lost was the perfect show for its time - right when the internet really came into its own as the perfect place for fans to discuss and theorize about all of their favorite things. I learned so much about Lost online. (view spoiler)

chapter 7: **Buffy the Vampire Slayer**. the show really shouldn't have been included in the book, and especially not in its particular place in the book, because it preceded Oz & The Sopranos. but I am glad Sepinwall included this chapter. it is basically a love letter to Buffy's creator, the ~~maverick~~ genius Joss Whedon. I'm down with a love letter to Whedon. I saved this chapter for last because the show is one of my favorite things in the world. the chapter did not disappoint. (view spoiler)

chapter 8: torture extravaganza **24** and its *maverick* co-creators Joel Surnow & Robert Cochran. the chapter does not shy away from all the torture and what that meant for 24 and its audience. kudos! it also doesn't shy away from the insane stupidity of Kim-getting-menaced-by-a-mountain-lion-for-2-episodes. I was specifically looking for that. double kudos! much time spent on the unique structure of the series and on Sutherland's awesomeness as Jack Bauer. (view spoiler)

chapter 9: a sort of all-over-the-map section on the marvelous **Battlestar Galactica**. some interesting commentary about science fiction on tv and on the distinctly non-methodical, open-to-all-options style of that show's **maverick** creator Ron Moore. this was the weakest chapter of the book for me and I would have appreciated more focus. the show is amazing. (view spoiler)

chapter 10: Friday Night Lights. never watched it. wanna watch it. I bet there's a maverick involved.

chapter 11: work of art **Mad Men** and its MAVERICK creator Matthew Weiner. a lot about AMC. maybe too much. still, Sepinwall clearly worships at the altar of both The Sopranos and Mad Men most of all, and so his discussion of the latter is particularly rich. I think he should write a whole book about Mad Men, although maybe leave AMC out of it as much as possible. ugh, AMC. what is wrong with executives over there? it is like they have taken lessons from Fox executives. ugh, executives. (view spoiler)

chapter 12: except for a slightly pointless Epilogue, the book ends with a great chapter on **Breaking Bad**. such enthusiasm! I appreciated the intelligence of Sepinwall's thoughts on the show and his focus on Breaking Bad's incredible look. it is one of the most beautifully shot television shows ever. and not just pretty shots, but shots that are exciting, challenging, strange. Sepinwall also has some interesting things to say about quirky show creator Vince Gilligan, who is apparently quite a
MAVERICKMAVERICKMAVERICKMAVERICKMAVERICKMAVERICKMAVERICKMAVERICKMAVERICKMAVERICK (view spoiler)

SUMMARY: so with all of the focus on the maverick creators behind each of these New Golden Age shows profiled, I found my old auteur theory gears turning. nice. I rarely think of auteurs when I think of tv. Sepinwall has certainly changed that. the whole book is an ode to auteurs of the small screen. (view spoiler)

Kemper says

Last week I was reading the chapter about *The Sopranos* in which the author highly praises James Gandolfini's performance as Tony. Galdolfini died the next day. That's one of those odd coincidences that I could live without.

TV critic Alan Sepinwall writes the popular HitFix blog What's Alan Watching? and here he takes a look at a dozen shows that revolutionized television since the late '90s. *Oz*, *The Sopranos*, *The Wire*, *Deadwood*, *The Shield*, *Lost*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *24*, *Battlestar Galactica*, *Friday Night Lights*, *Mad Men* and *Breaking Bad* were all groundbreaking in their own ways and proved that there were audiences for well-made shows that pushed boundaries and revolutionized the way TV got made and watched.

Each show gets its own chapter in which Sepinwall gives the history of how the show came about, summarizes its storylines, relays behind-the-scenes anecdotes and then examines the elements that made the show special and how it pushed the medium forward. Interviews with creators, producers, writers and network executives provide background and thoughts from inside the industry as to how these shows changed the business.

Many of the stories behind the creation of the shows would make for interesting books just by themselves. *Lost* came from one ABC executive who figured he was about to be fired and rushed the most expensive pilot in TV history into production, and *Mad Men* was the result of AMC's desire to get some kind of critically acclaimed show that would generate buzz on the air because the network feared some cable providers were going to drop them. The universal theme for most of these shows is that creative people who had felt stifled by their experiences in Hollywood delivered when circumstances finally gave them an opportunity to do something different.

Sepinwall keeps his critic's hat on though and gives frank appraisals of mistakes like the *Friday Night Lights* train wreck of a second season or *24*'s frequent lapses into stories involving amnesia, torture, and a cougar. He also details how fan dissatisfaction with some of the finales like *Lost*, *Battlestar Galactica* and *The*

Sopranos can affect their feelings towards the series as a whole.

Since he gives a story overview for each show, there are plenty of spoilers so if there's a show you've been meaning to watch but haven't gotten around to yet it'd be best to skip those sections. However, each chapter is pretty much self-contained when so it'd still be possible to read around that and not lose the overall theme of what Sepinwall is looking at here.

This isn't just some dry analysis either. Sepinwall has a good sense of humor and has been writing about TV long enough to come up with interesting ways to translate what we see on a screen into words. Here's what he has to say about one show's breakneck pacing:

You didn't so much watch The Shield as get beat up by it for an hour before it went off to grab a few beers and find a pimp to hassle.

If you've read Sepinwall's blog, a lot of these stories and themes will seem somewhat familiar because they're points he's touched on when he's written about these shows before, but this was a chance for him to do an overview on an era of TV that came as many circumstances changed the old model of doing business and helped fuel a wave of creativity. Sepinwall's enthusiasm for good TV is contagious and thanks to this book, I'm sure I'll be cracking open some DVD sets and hitting HBO Go in the near future to revisit a lot of these myself.

Also posted at Kemper's Book Blog.

Anthony says

2016 holiday read!

A very good and interesting read on the shows that helped TV be what it is today. It was between this and *Difficult Men*, but I decided to go for this because I'd seen more of the shows covered in this book and it looks like *Difficult Men* mostly covers *The Sopranos*.

I feel like I should point out though, the chapters on shows you haven't seen will potentially spoil the TV show for you (if you plan on watching it eventually). It's not done with malice and intention, but you can't really go into the *sopranos* or *Deadwood* without mentioning some major character deaths.

I particularly liked the chapters on *Friday Night Lights* and *Breaking Bad*. And it's made me want to re-watch both shows even more.

Brad says

There is a scene in the show *Portlandia* when the main characters decide to kill some time before a dinner party by watching the pilot episode of *Battlestar Galactica*, one of the shows Alan Sepinwall covers in this book.

Twenty four hours later, we find the characters still sitting on the couch, unshowered, having missed the dinner party, wondering to each other if they should move or just continue watching the show.

As somebody who has never watched an episode of *Battlestar Galactica*, I wondered along with them if I should invest some time.

After reading Sepinwall's excellent book, *The Revolution Was Televised*, it appears I should start watching that show, along with *Mad Men*, *The Sopranos*, and *Breaking Bad*.

Not only does Sepinwall write a book that is easy to read, he breaks down why these shows shook the pillars of traditional television, and why we should invest our time.

Let's face it: A lot of what we find on television sucks. So Sepinwall, one of the most well-respected modern television critics, wants to open our eyes to shows that don't. Within the 300+ pages, he has done just that.

If I can take anything away from this book, it's that I have a lot of catching up to do over the holidays.

Craig says

Alan Sepinwall is my favourite TV critic and his book about the 12 most influential drama series of the current era feels like it was written just for me. I thought I knew most of these shows inside out already but Sepinwall's interviews with the creators on the development process was fascinating, teaching me things I don't think I would be able to find anywhere else. If you are a fan of any of the shows discussed within, this is a must read.

Doug Cutchins says

Two of my favorite online writers and podcasters are Linda Holmes and Bill Simmons, so when both endorsed Sepinwall's new book, I knew I needed to read it. I've watched exactly half of the 12 shows that he surveys in this excellent book, so it was an exercise in both reviewing familiar territory and exploring new lands that I had not yet ventured into.

The book is excellent. Sepinwall somehow provides more or less the same information about each show (concept, writing, pitching, casting, pilot, pick-up, developing each season, and (as warranted) concluding the series, and somehow does not resort to a formula. Each chapter is engaging, critical, and fast-paced.

I did wish, though, that Sepinwall had either constructed the book differently, or that he now writes a sequel. The most interesting parts are not the behind-the-scenes, how-it-was-written details of each of the 12 shows, but instead when he looks at the overarching themes that connect all 12. His too-brief but exceptionally tantalizing thoughts on why all of the protagonists seem to be men, or what the rise of DVDs and DVRs in the decade of the '00s meant for the development of serialized dramas are fantastic. I just wish that half the book had been these bigger thoughts. For example: this era coincides with the rise of America's first African-American president, but nowhere does Sepinwall discuss this epochal event and how it may have impacted television shows, or almost anything else about how race or class appeared during this era.

Sepinwall self-published this book, which feels as earth-shaking to the book distribution system as Louis CK's self-produced comedy show a year ago may end up being to certain forms of television.

Justin says

"The Revolution Was Televised" is mostly useful as a collection of parsed interviews that the author conducted with the creators/writers/producers of the various shows lionized therein, including, but not limited to: *The Wire*, *Deadwood*, *Lost*, *Battlestar Galactica*, *Mad Men*, and above all else (in the author's mind, at least) *The Sopranos*.

This book's failings are not just due to Sepinwall's home-town cheerleading for *The Sopranos* (a show with two pretty good seasons and four average-to-awful seasons) at the expense of other, far superior shows; they are also due to the fact that the author has spent the last two decades as an episodic TV recapper, and is desperate to find a way to translate that fairly mundane activity into a profound statement that Says Something about American culture and TV history. In this, he does not succeed.

Some of the anecdotes provided by David Simon, Chris Albrecht, David Milch, et al. are pretty good though.

Bjorn says

Alan Sepinwall started out as a TV critic back in the mid-90s, when most people still couldn't conceive that there was anything on TV you could write enough about to earn the title "critic". Then came the new wave of US TV drama in the late 90s and throughout the 00s, with shows that tried to use the medium to tell stories that no other medium could; complex, ambitious, character-driven, taking months or even years to unfold and add to themselves, tackling real-life issues from the personal to the political through fiction. *Oz*, *The Sopranos*, *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*, *The Wire*, *Deadwood*, *The Shield*, *Lost*, *Battlestar Galactica*, *Mad Men*, *Breaking Bad*...

So in this book, Sepinwall goes around and interviews the producers, writers and actors of these and other shows, talks to them about how it happened, what they were trying to do, how they work, their relationship to the network and to other media, and how come creative talent seems to shift to the so-called idiot box while Hollywood becomes ever more obsessed with blockbusters and needless remakes.

Obviously, your opinion of the book will depend on your opinion of the subject. If you're a fan - however you define that term - of any or some of these series, it's a very good read indeed; if you couldn't care less, you won't care any more. Sepinwall is obviously fascinated with them, and at times he becomes a little too respectful of them, but he gets his interviewees talking and gets to the root of the trickier issues around them - why we care about virtually irredeemable characters like Tony Soprano and Walter White, what does it say that the first TV series inspired by 9/11 was a sci-fi series loosely based on a crap 70s show, the way people elevate Don Draper to a style icon even as his story becomes more disturbing, whether this is a permanent improvement of the medium or just a lucky blip on the radar...

The only major drawback is that the book is entirely focused on the shows Sepinwall likes. Everything else - including the fact that the CSIs, the American Idols and the 2 1/2 Mens of the world still get 10 times the viewership of any well-scripted HBO drama aiming for Great American Novel territory - barely gets a

mention. But then, that's not the point either.

Ailsa says

Alan Sepinwall's thesis in *The Revolution was Televised* - that a collection of tv shows in the past 15 years represent a sea change in the medium - is hardly groundbreaking. The excitement generated by many of the shows Sepinwall deals with has been widely lauded - and more of less everywhere you hear the TV commentariat proclaiming that TV is (capable of) displacing film and literature as the grown up, serious medium for the masses. (*in fact it might have been interesting if Sepinwall had pursued this line slightly more.... For example, what about the involvement of literary big hitters John Fran and Jennifer Egan in developing their award winning novels for TV rather than film? But this might just be my lit geek tendencies emerging)

But regardless of the fact that Sepinwall is hardly telling us anything we don't know about how good TV has been recently, his book is nevertheless an interesting series of case studies that draws links between 12 iconic TV shows, considering just how they came to be, and what makes them so noteworthy. The stories of the unlikely path from pitch to screen that these shows took, and the creative processes involved is fascinating, and the analysis always compelling. Even when discussing shows I haven't watched, or feel ambivalent about, Sepinwall is able to convey his enthusiasm, and use the tools of his trade to make you want to blow all your hard earned pennies on box sets of pretty much every show he touches upon.

Indeed, Sepinwall's skills as a writer are what really shine throughout this book: conversational and compelling, smart without being laden with academese, a book that could have easily descended into plot summaries and piecemeal interviews actually coheres to create an exciting portrait of an industry and a period. The book certainly isn't without flaws: the omission of *Six Feet Under* feels glaring to me, the one show per chapter format can occasionally create repetitions, and few things will irk me more than a quirky footnote system (one of the few giveaways that this is a self-published effort...) But these notwithstanding, the book is pretty much a must for anyone who gives a damn about good TV.
