

The Best Show On TV

by Joe Mulder

"The Office" (NBC) – 2/9/2006 - 4/2/2006
"Huff" (Showtime) – 4/2/2006 - 8/26/2006
"Big Brother" (CBS) – 8/26/2006 - 10/4/2006
"South Park" (Comedy Central) – 10/4/2006 - 11/30/2006
"The Office" (NBC) – 11/30/2006 - 1/14/2007
"24" (Fox) – 1/14/2007 - 4/5/2007
"30 Rock" (NBC) – 4/5/2007 - 4/10/2008
"House" (Fox) – 4/10/2008 - 10/5/2008
"Dexter" (Showtime) – 10/5/2008 - 11/18/2008
"The Shield" (FX) – 11/18/2008 - 11/24/2008
"How I Met Your Mother" (CBS) – 11/24/2008 - 1/8/2009
"30 Rock" (NBC) – 1/8/2009 - 9/9/2009
"Glee" (Fox) – 9/9/2009 - 10/28/2009
"Friday Night Lights" (NBC) – 10/28/2009 - 2/10/2011
"Community" (NBC) – 2/10/2011 – 7/17/2011
"Breaking Bad" (AMC) – 7/17/2011 - present

It's no kind of spoiler to say that Walter White, the character portrayed by Bryan Cranston on AMC's "Breaking Bad," is capable of doing some dark things. Some extreme things. Such is the nature of any central character on any show about the world of criminals, and that in itself isn't particularly remarkable.

What makes Walter White, a cancer patient and high school science teacher-turned-meth cooker, so compelling is that when we first meet him, back in Season 1, he's very much the American Everyman, undoubtedly imagining himself no more capable of robbing, maiming and killing than you or I consider ourselves to be.

But the capacity for such action lies within most of us, it is suggested; might it be that our circumstances, rather than our consciences or moral codes, dictate our behavior to a far greater degree than we'd care to admit?

The writer Bill James, widely known as a pioneer in the world of baseball statistics but recently the author of a true crime book, put it this way in a recent interview:

It is not as if we walk through one doorway and decide that murder is acceptable. You have to walk through many doorways. The first doorway leads to a party, where people are doing drugs and having fun. The second doorway leads to more partying. It's a long, long series of doorways, until you end up in a room where a terrible thing happens. So the question is, "How many doorways away are you?" It's not a question about a person's capacity to commit a murder. It's a question of how many doorways we keep between ourselves and that situation.

And so it is on "Breaking Bad;" for Walter White – husband, father, science teacher, humble taxpayer – the doors keep flying open, leading him into a world in which his mere

survival from time to time necessarily precludes the survival of others.

I'd love to write more – I do so enjoy these "Best Show On TV" pieces, and I might not get to write another one for a while with "Breaking Bad" being as good as it is – but if you're not watching "Breaking Bad" then I don't want to spoil anything, and if you are watching it then I can't tell you anything you don't already know.

So let me just say that we have a new "The Best Show On TV" (and by a fairly wide margin), and leave it at that.
