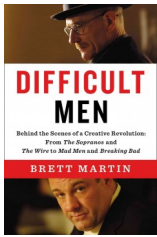


Difficult Men



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This is an interesting book detailing the rise of what the author terms the "Third Golden Age of Television". He provides in-depth details on the development, reaction, and impact of several critically acclaimed television shows ([The Sopranos](#), [The Wire](#), [Deadwood](#), [Mad Men](#)) and touches on others more peripherally ([The Shield](#), [Six Feet Under](#), [Breaking Bad](#) and various others). [Note: The Library may not, and probably will not, have the entirety of some of these shows, so check the catalog if you are inclined to (re-)watch any of them]. The author provides a context for how these new shows developed (going back to briefly recap the first two 'ages' on network television) and traces how this third Age was able to come about only on premium and basic cable stations.

Compiling information from other sources (listed in the back of the book for additional reading) and his own interviews with showrunners and their writing staff, executives, as well as some of the directors and actors, he makes a case for a running theme in most of these shows and how they revolve around so-called "[difficult men](#)". This refers to most of the main characters portrayed on these shows (so far), but also the men in charge of their creation (David Chase, David Simon, David Milch, and Matthew Weiner, specifically). While it does get a bit gossipy at times in its detail, I thoroughly enjoyed the behind-the-scenes stories and the argument for taking seriously what the author considers to be the dominant (popular) art-form of our nascent 21st century. He certainly makes the case for what I was inclined to believe before reading the book, anyway; the storytelling among serialized dramatic television shows that belong under this rubric (he is, of course, not including most network shows, reality shows, or the like) is advancing in ways that the novel has not for quite some time and that this kind of 'novel-like' television is becoming increasingly closer to a cultural equal in terms of critical quality (perhaps putting aside the literacy-building aspect of the printed word, or [Neil Postman](#) would be turning in his grave). Be warned that if you have not seen the entirety of the series being written about, there are some significant spoilers. Also, the author has written a [previous book](#) entirely on *The Sopranos*, so it seems like there is a little more coverage of that show here than some of the others (though this is probably also because it happens to be one of the first-of-its-kind). This is not an academic book by any means, so the argument for how these shows work is not exactly the focus here, but it provides some perspective on how there is a certain kind of quality available on the airwaves today that those who dismiss television outright as 'mindless junk' are missing. The argument on whether this evolution is just beginning or coming to an end is one for another book entirely....

Posted by Brandon R. on January 28, 2014

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