

Screen, Screen Features

The Best TV Shows of the 2010s

An ensemble of Screen writers take a look at the best television of the past decade.

5 mins read

Written Screen , Sally Denning Francesca Sylph Jacob Heayes Jonathan Chern Henry Jordan
by Ben Faulkner Oliver Leader de Saxe & William Thornton | Feb 9, 2020



The Office undoubtedly spawned a subgenre of American mockumentary sitcoms, but the crown might just be *Parks and Recreation*. Lasting seven seasons, the series follows a Parks and Recreation department in a local government in the American Midwest. At the centre of the show is Leslie Knope, the lovable bureaucrat with aspirations of affecting change at higher office. *Parks* not only fell into the mockumentary niche, but also led the new phenomenon of the meme-able show. With genuinely affecting relationships, most of all, *Parks* symbolises

the optimism of American shows. If we offered *The Thick of It* as an answer to political satire, then the US gave us something actually heartwarming – *Johnny Chern, Print Screen Editor*

There are fewer things more terrifying than the atrocities committed over our tumultuous histories. The news nowadays is often more of a frightening spectacle than any season of *American Horror Story*. In that spirit, I'd argue that *Chernobyl* was the scariest series to haunt televisions in the past decade; it was *pure* horror, the kind that gets under your skin and wrangles your brain until the sheer misery and injustice of it all becomes unbearable. That's just the first episode. Comprised of five brutal parts, this is a remarkably paced and relentless experience setting itself apart from other period dramas in its brilliant characterisation and kineticism. The aforementioned first episode is a torturous display of dramatic irony, as families dance in the 'snow storm', blissfully unaware of the lethal doses of radiation wreaking havoc on their bodies. *Chernobyl* is a uniquely morbid show in this regard; every character on-screen at some point is stricken by the aftereffects of the nuclear explosion and as such, is automatically doomed to an early and agonising death. Hardly relaxing teatime television, but that very rare kind of drama that glues your eyes to the set and scorches its images onto your retinas for weeks to come – *Jacob Heayes, Online Screen Editor*

"I'll see you in 25 years". These were the last words heard from *Twin Peaks*' Laura Palmer in the finale of the hit 90s TV show, and, just like Laura promised, after revolutionising American TV in 1990, 25 years later writing and directing duo Mark Frost and David Lynch came back to do it all again. The result was this: *Twin Peaks: The Return*, a so-called 'limited event series' that re-invited us back into the world of Twin Peaks in a much darker and more surreal way, like never before. It's near-impossible to even begin to describe what it's like watching the 18-part miniseries, apart from saying that any hardcore Lynch fan like myself won't be disappointed in the slightest, and that you'll never watch anything like it again – *Will Thornton*

Game of Thrones' strengths lie in many places, but what made the show so compelling was how it managed to balance so many characters in so many places and make you understand and care about them all.

I don't think it would be too controversial a statement to say that we had a rough decade. In all this darkness, thank God we had a gleaming beacon of wholesome light in *The Great British Bake Off*. While not an immediate hit on its release in 2010, the cult of *Bake Off* has only grown since, to unite us in the most joyously low stakes reality show on TV. I'm not kidding, the "incidents" section on

Wikipedia hits dramatic heights like mistaken custard borrowing or the Baked Alaska meltdown. Otherwise, it's all love and hugs, to the extent that Mel and Sue would swear at the camera if a contestant was crying, in order to make the footage unusable. Speaking of, many feared the move to Channel 4 might sink the show but no, Prue, Noel and Sandi have proved wonderful replacements. Whether the show remains as strong in the new decade is uncertain (that bottom is starting to get a little soggy) but throughout this decade, we always had *Bake Off* as our comfort food – *Henry Jordan*

It is truly special to witness the kind of television behemoth that *Game of Thrones* became. At a certain point this decade, the contents of each episode spilled over into genuine news stories. It captured our attention the way no show before has, and for good reason. *Game of Thrones'* strengths lie in many places, but what made the show so compelling was how it managed to balance so many characters in so many places and make you understand and care about them all. The expanding geography of the show, the interwoven complex storylines, the fantasy, the medieval battles made everything about it delicious. Shame about how it ended – *Johnny Chern, Print Screen Editor*

The adventures of wannabe maverick cop Jake Peralta and his colleagues at Brooklyn's 99th precinct are my go-to comfort viewing on Netflix, and have had a profound impact on me as a person- I blew £70 on a leather jacket and sunglasses to dress up as Peralta for Halloween and now must say 'noice' instead of 'nice'. It has given us perhaps TV's greatest comic character in the deadpan Captain Raymond Holt, whose pitch-perfect delivery can make absolutely anything funny (BONEEEEEE?) and perhaps its sweetest couple in Jake and bookish fellow officer Amy Santiago. Along the way, it's managed to tackle such sensitive topics as racial profiling, sexual harassment and government surveillance with delicacy and intelligence whilst not sacrificing the screwball comedy that has made it so endearing. It's a show that touches you deep inside and makes you scream (title of your sex tape) – *Isaac Bettridge*

You can trace a decade's worth of prestige long-form television back to the drug-fuelled escapades of Walter White and Jesse Pinkman.

Even looking back on *Breaking Bad* seven years after it finished, it's not difficult to see how much of a gamechanger it was. You can trace a decade's worth of prestige long-form television back to the drug-fuelled escapades of Walter White and Jesse Pinkman. Walt's transformation from cancer-ridden family man to brutal crime kingpin is one of the greatest arcs in television history. But more than that, the show is laced with a level of cinematic understanding rarely seen in television

before. Just look at the excellent bottle episode “Fly” with its claustrophobic and dynamic camera movements as Bryan Cranston hunts down a fly in the lab with a unique kind of derangement, or the pink teddy bear motif that recurs throughout season 2 until the jaw-dropping reveal. It signalled to the world that television could be every bit as technical as cinema, and even more addictive than blue meth – *Ollie Leader de Saxe*

Somewhere, in *Bojack Horseman*’s third season, Diane Nguyen declares “All those perky, well-adjusted people you see in movies and TV shows? I don’t think they exist.” Considering the show’s lengthy, heart-wrenching catalogue of perceptive quotes, this one in particular captures the heart that creator Raphael Bob-Waksberg translates so palpably. The show presents a zany, animated catalogue of outlandish situational comedy in a universe shared by humans and anthropomorphic animals. The razor-sharp wit and pop culture nods play palate cleanser to the show’s carefully crafted pathos. The writers have consistently impressed and devastated in their explorations of loneliness, fame, nihilism, happiness and what the pursuit of the latter does to the human psyche. By its final season, they’ve asked these questions of a whole ensemble of characters, leaving us with a show that teaches as much about the art of crafting and studying characters as it does comedy and farce. Blind-drunk on its own maze of meta-references, and with sincerity and insight that defy anything else on television, *Bojack* has forced us to examine the troubled, lonely, washed-up horse actor that lives within every single one of us – *Ben Faulkner*

Based on the novels by Luke Jennings and brought to life by Phoebe Waller-Bridge of *Fleabag* fame, *Killing Eve* is an example of taking the typical cat-and-mouse story and revitalising it. After the first season, *Killing Eve* catapulted to TV fame; one of the main reasons for this is Jodie Comer’s fantastic acting, who plays Villanelle and Sandra Oh, who plays Eve. Comer’s changing accents and impressive dramatic range make for a particularly dynamic character. Fiona Shaw’s performance as Eve’s boss Carolyn is just another example of *Killing Eve*’s many eclectic characters. While Oh and Shaw’s performances are unsurprisingly brilliant, Comer steals the show. The first season is full of wit, darkness, and twists, as the audience gets to know Villanelle and Eve, and their obsession with each other thanks to fantastic writing by Waller-Bridge. *Killing Eve* is one of the best TV series’ I have watched in years and definitely deserves the number two spot – *Sally Denning*

“I have a horrible feeling that I’m a greedy perverted, selfish, apathetic, cynical, depraved, morally bankrupt woman who can’t even call herself a feminist.”

Fleabag is not your typical main character, but that is precisely what makes her so fucking wonderful. Phoebe Waller-Bridge’s masterpiece is the perfect blend of comedy and drama – utterly devastating one second, and completely hilarious the next. There is an overwhelming feeling of empowerment in finally seeing that character we have been craving for years. An “oversexed, emotionally unfiltered and self-obsessed woman” who represents the best and the worst in us.

Overflowing with sex, shame and sadness, Fleabag is quite possibly the most realistic show on television. I think there is a moment for all of us. A moment we relate to so much, that it hurts a little bit. Maybe it’s the grief, or the heartbreak, or the insecurity (hopefully not the Obama scene). The magic of Fleabag is that it makes us feel seen. It makes us feel less alone. What more could you ask for?

“Love is all any of us want and it’s hell when we get there! So, no wonder it’s something we don’t want to do on our own.” – Francesca Sylph

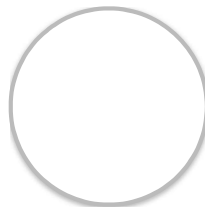
2010s
shows

Breaking Bad
Twin Peaks

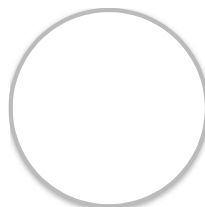
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Game Of Thrones

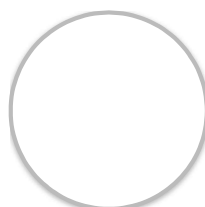
tv



SCREEN



SALLY DENNING



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