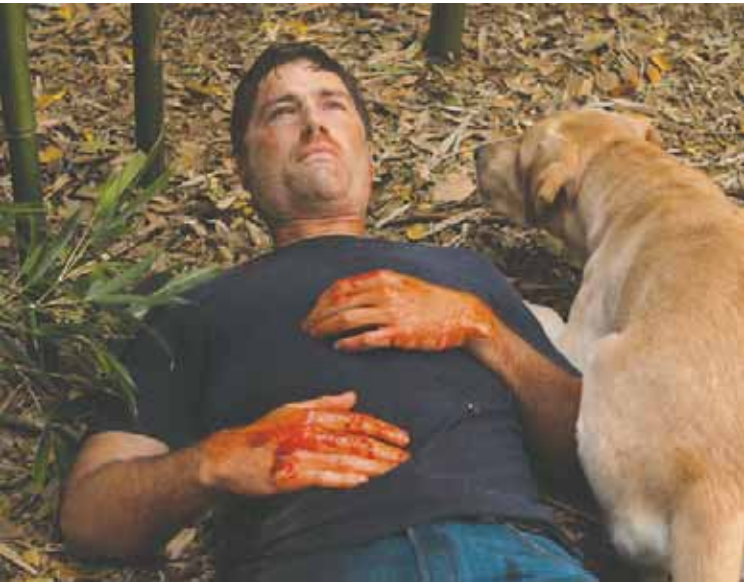


TELEVISION

You could tell this wouldn't end well



MARIO PEREZ/ABC VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

Matthew Fox in “Lost”: Everybody loves it, but you’ve got to admit that what started with a plane crash ended with a train wreck.

BY CAITLIN MOORE

Sometelevision shows end well, with a satisfying and thoughtful conclusion worthy of the critical acclaim and rabid fans who were kept to the end. And then there are all the others. Not only did “Boardwalk Empire” creators find a graceful way to wrap up its five seasons, they also had the courage to do so well before audiences wearied of it — joining the acclaimed ranks of shows like “Breaking Bad,” “The Wire” and “30 Rock” that managed not to wear out their welcome. Contrast that with “Two and a Half Men,” which last month dragged sullenly into its 12th and final season. Forgive us, oh TV gods, as we list some of the shows that went on too long — and a few that need to be put out of their misery. (Spoilers abound.)

“The Office” (2005-2013)

A great workplace comedy for many years, “The Office” was also one of the first “mockumentaries” that really took off on network TV. After a middling first season, the cast caught a groove and went on to perfect the art of the awkward laugh. Viewers cringed and guffawed in equal measure. But right around the end of Season 7, the wheels came a little loose. When you replace a lead actor on any show, it’s a gamble. But when you replace Steve Carell, the heart and well-intentioned soul of the whole thing? You’re betting the house. There were a few great episodes and arcs in the last two seasons — some serious rifts between Jim and Pam, the big reveal of the folks behind the camera — but it all felt a little too late, especially amid the confusing mass of office newbies. (Remember Clark? Exactly.)

When it should have ended: After Michael’s sad farewell. Wrap up a few loose ends and boom, roasted.

“How I Met Your Mother” (2005-2014)

With any incestuous friend group, you run the risk of wearing out relationships — and plot devices — rather quickly. As the show progressed, main character Ted (the “I” of the title) became less of a hopeless romantic and more of a lovelorn snob. The relationships became more exhausting than exciting. Ted and Robin at first? Yay! Barney and Robin at first? Yay? Barney and Robin again? Okay. . . Ted and Robin again? It seemed like the writers stopped trying to create new situations and just played a game of Sitcom Musical Chairs — while, in fine CBS style, the network indulged them too long because the ratings were too good. **When it should have ended:** Anytime before Season 9. We can count the number of people who were satisfied with the conclusion on one hand. With no fin- gers.

“Scrubs” (2001-2010)

This hospital sitcom survived not only a brisk rotation through new time slots but a shift over to an entirely new network. The seamless melding of J.D.’s daydreams with his actual work life gave the show a sense of magical realism that was unique among prime-time series. But these fantastical elements soon became more crutch than flourish. (Who cares about emotions? Let’s do an episode entirely in a fairy-tale world!) However, the move from NBC to ABC for Season 8 seemed a rare chance to give the show the heartfelt finale it deserved, in



MONTY BRINTON/CBS

“The Big Bang Theory” is still on? Johnny Galecki and Kaley Cuoco-Sweeting star in a series that relies on dated stereotypes.

a season with more character focus. Of course ABC couldn’t leave well enough alone, and Season 9 happened — but it was really “Season 9,” a sorta-kinda-spinoff-but-technically-the-same-show that should have never existed. Even creator Bill Lawrence didn’t like it. **When it should have ended:** With the finale of Season 8. While some may argue seasons 6 and 7 were rough (J.D. managing to impregnate Kim without hav- ing sex; way too many dream se- quences), J.D.’s final walk through the hospital would have been a perfect ending.

“Lost” (2004-2010)

Don’t get us wrong, “Lost” was great. One of the best. But a show that centered on characters in a plane crash peppered with my- thology slowly became a show about mythology peppered with character development. On low points in its roller coaster ride, more questions were raised than answered, providing a frustrat- ing (if intermittently enthralling) experience for the viewer. When producers announced during the third season that they already knew when they wanted the se- ries to end, they appeared to ac- knowledge the bumpiness of the show’s ride. A scheduled finale “gives everyone a feeling of cer- tainty that the story is driving to a conclusion. It’s time for us now to find an end point for the show,” executive producer Carl- ton Cuse said. Coincidentally or not, the following Season 4 was quite strong, but that didn’t last. **When it should have ended:** For “Lost,” it’s less when it should have ended, but how. Yes, just come out and say it: They were all in purgatory. The end.

“Friends” (1994-2004)

A giant hit in its day, it’s become

part of our cultural DNA in syn- dication, the characters remain- ing archetypes for our time (“He’s a controlling nebbish: Such a Ross”). But it got mired in melo- dramatic relationships and sim- plistic solutions. In the fifth year of the show alone, after Ross mis- takenly says Rachel’s name at the altar, his new wife, Emily, gives him an ultimatum, Phoebe gives birth to her brother’s triplets, and Ross and Rachel get drunk- enly married, beating a newly coupled Chandler and Monica to the punch. While the show was still well-written enough to have memorable jokes and iconic characters throughout its 10 se- sons, it floundered for played-out plots in the second half of its run. **When it should have ended:** Before they ever tested the whole Joey-Rachel thing in Season 8. It put Ross in a weird place, strained the dynamics of the group and seemed to be more of a try-hard ratings ploy than a natural development — espe- cially considering Rachel was preg- nant with Ross’s baby at the time. Obviously.

“True Blood” (2008-2014)

A steamy show set in the sexy South where humans and vam- pires live in discordant harmony. What’s not to love? Well, toward the end, a lot. The signs started to come about halfway through the bloody HBO series. As TV critic Hank Stuever noted in his review of the beginning of Se- son 4, “the cast keeps expanding into an overpopulated mishmash of disparate story threads that no longer weave together as a whole. . . . Characters I care less about (waitresses, extraneous vampires, panther hillbillies on meth) are getting as much or more time as characters I initial- ly adored.” When showrunner Alan Ball stepped down after five



RON P. JAFFE/FOX VIA CBS

“How I Met Your Mother,” starring Josh Radnor and Cristin Milioti: We’d cried “Uncle” a year before it identified “Mother.”

seasons, the show seemed to lose its last bit of cohesion, providing a simply messy and overly campy final two seasons.

When it should have ended: With the end of Season 5, while it was still on top. We could’ve avoided that odd series finale.

As for shows still on the air . . .

“Grey’s Anatomy”

Why it should end: Listen, we all love Shonda Rhimes and her melodramatic shows. But there is such a thing as too outlandish, and “Grey’s” has crossed the line a time too many. We were out as soon as Izzie performed surgery on a deer in the Seattle Grace parking lot just to prove a point.

“Bones”

Why it should end: Bones and Booth are together, Sweets is dead and there are only so many times you can reasonably be tar- geted by a serial killer before you just quit your job and live in a bunker.

“Two and a Half Men”

Why it should end: This is sup- posedly the last (and 12th) se- son, so that’s a relief. Is anyone really demanding an Ashton Kutcher-Jon Cryer television show? Charlie Sheen and Angus T. Jones have moved on. So should the rest of us.

“The Big Bang Theory”

Why it should end: There’s no plot, just the endless reinforce- ment of awkward nerd and hot girl stereotypes played for cheap laughs. The humor is so dated: It cleaves to the idea that superhe- ro fandom is the realm of hard- core geekery, instead of the big- gest thing in pop culture today. (And it’s terrible.)

“Cougartown”

Why it should end: The switch to TBS did not do the show any favors, and it lost its flow. In the words of our sage critic Stuever, it looks like the actors are “blink- ing out ‘please come rescue me’ with their eyelids.”

“Glee”

Why it should (and is) end(ing): There’s music that en- hances a story line, and then there’s just music for the sake of album sales. And pregnancies for the sake of pregnancies. And cameos for the sake of cameos. It pretty much went downhill as soon as they left high school. (“Saved by the Bell: The College Years,” anyone?) *A caveat: We didn’t include shows under five seasons.*

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