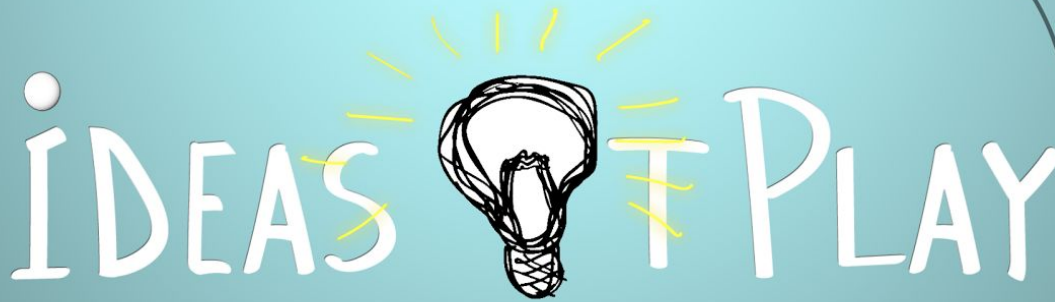


May 2017

Ideas At Play Newsletter



Hello! My name is Jackson and this is the first ever monthly Ideas At Play newsletter! This special reward is meant to thank my Patreon supporters and provide a look into everything I've watched from the previous month. You'll see what I'm watching, why I'm watching them, and what I think. I've included what episodes I watched as well in case you're curious. Being the first of these, the formatting will almost definitely change, but I hope you enjoy it!

Thanks!



Rick and Morty

Eps: 301

I discovered Rick and Morty after the second season had wrapped so I didn't have to wait nearly as long as more hardcore fans, but it was surreal to see it on my TV screen on April Fools Day. After its many false starts, I had resigned myself to the idea that it might never come, or if it did, that it would fail to live up to expectations.

The Good: It did live up to expectations. As always, it was fast paced, and used its great balance and juxtaposition between its A, B, and C storylines to explore deeper existential issues. I was worried they might change this season into a serial, and they still might, but I'm glad that so far it looks like they've reset everything.

The Bad: It was on when Samurai Jack was supposed to be. And that it's disappeared again. F*** you Dan Harmon, either bring it back or don't—pick one.



Get Out

Movies are tough for me and I don't know why. It's something that, as a former film student, has literally kept me up at night. I just like TV more. That's not to say I don't like movies, just that I don't watch nearly as many as I should. So it was kind of a big deal that I actually got up, went down the street, and sat in a real life movie theater to see this one.

The Good: There was so much to love about *Get Out*. As a white person, it was interesting to see this perspective, both making complete fun of and expressing a deeper fear that exists between races. I'm not the person who really can or should define that perspective but it felt eye-opening for me. It was equally interesting to see something with such a distinctive voice. I was reminded of *Cabin in the Woods*, for its equal parts horror, comedy, and genre satire, but *Get Out* took that blueprint and added an entire wing to accommodate its social commentary.

The Bad: I have no bad things to say about this movie. I wish they could have killed some of the villains more than twice, but hey, I'll take what I can get.



Better Call Saul

Eps: 301–303 (3 total)

I imagine most people weren't even aware that the third season had started. At times, its existence has felt like little more than *Breaking Bad* nostalgia, but it has become a more than solid show in its own right.

The Good: This show is expertly made. There are no weak points in the production, and everything from the directing to the acting to the cinematography works together just as they should, elevating each to a higher level. You can easily watch an episode and find yourself entertained by this team's mastery of the craft of TV.

The Bad: You'll forget about it until you watch it again. The argument surrounding the show seems to be that it's stuck in *Breaking Bad*'s shadow, but really, it's worse than that. After all, Jimmy hasn't felt like Saul since early in the first season, and only he and Mike connect the two universes—and Mike's story has always been the B or even C plotline. The fact of the matter is that the story of brothers trying to stealthily one up each other through legal minutiae just isn't that interesting. Certainly not as interesting as cooking meth to pay for cancer treatment. But I've heard lawyers find it to be a very realistic representation of the paperwork hoops they have to jump through, so there's that.



The Wire

305-312 (8 total)

I started watching *The Wire* God knows how long ago, and every couple of months I feel the push to finish the season that I'd inevitably forgotten about. Such was the case with what is generally considered to be one of the greatest seasons of television ever. And it was good! It was really good! But I didn't enjoy it as much as I wish I did.

The Bad: It's slow. I was listening to an interview with *Lost* and *The Leftovers* creator Damon Lindelof where he mentioned that he thought it was boring at first. He was met with gasps. But not from me. I get it. *The Wire* can get bogged down in the intricacy of its story at times. By the third season, I've noticed that the first 8 or so episodes of a *Wire* season are spent setting up all of its pieces in a very calculated way. It's like that one scene in *V for Vendetta* where all of the dominoes are meticulously set up one by one, but instead of 5 minutes, it's 6-8 hours.

The Good: It is one of, if not the most sophisticated story I've ever watched, full stop. Thinking about the effort, time, and skill it must have taken to pull that off truly makes my head spin. Truly makes my head spin. Sorry. To flesh out a cast of characters as long as a list of my grandma's medication is a monumental achievement in and of itself. And when those dominoes do get knocked over, the resulting image is a vivid mosaic of Baltimore. Its target is the heart of the city—not the police work or the drug trade—and so even as those technologies have become obsolete, it remains as relevant as ever.



Samurai Jack

Eps: 501–507, 101, 102, 210, 303, 212 (13 total)

I was never a huge Samurai Jack fan growing up. I remember it being one of my dad's favorite cartoons that I would watch, so I kept up with it, but I don't think I ever got it. I saw the promotions for the reboot (Allston was absolutely covered in Aku's face), but I didn't think I'd actually sit down and watch it until my roommate convinced me.

The Good: It's been a while since I've had as much fun watching a television show as I've had with this season of Samurai Jack. It's the most visually creative and interesting television show I've ever seen. I was so blown away that I went back and watched some of the original run and found that, with the exception of the two part pilot, the original doesn't hold a candle to the artistry of the reboot. Stay tuned for a video on this series. I've already watched the third episode of the reboot 4 or 5 times.

The Bad: Literally nothing. You could make the argument that the story in the original was lacking, but it was never the main focus. The story during Season 5 has been just as amazing as the visuals.



Fargo

Eps: 301

Season 2 was fantastic, and while I didn't watch the first season, the consensus seems to be that it was very good as well.

The Good: The vibe that made this show so charming is more than present, as are the absurdist values that provide its unique dark comedy. In this world, life is what it is, even and especially when it doesn't make any sense. So it's only fitting that they'd have Ewan McGregor play the two lead brothers, one who wears house shoes as he's being swept up into a massive criminal organization, while the other is a parole officer who's trying to make money in bridge tournaments with his criminal girlfriend. The show is slow, but I've never minded it in Fargo, where everything and everybody seems to take their time with life.

The Bad: I'm not sure what's different about this season. Last season saw the introduction of an alien spaceship as a tool for the absurd, but I'm not sure where you can go from there. Plus, Ewan McGregor looks really grody in that wig.



Buffy the Vampire Slayer

321–405 (7 total)

I remember Buffy Slayer always being on in my home growing up, but I never watched it. I wasn't even a teenager by the time it ended, so that's probably for the best. Seeing as it still has cultural relevance, I decided to revisit it a little while back. Good god, I love this show.

The Good: There will be more to come on this once I finally finish the show, but so far I've really enjoyed nearly every episode. The show takes itself seriously, but only with its characters. It realizes that both the premise and the plot are ridiculous, and it revels in it, reaching that difficult-to-master level of camp that so many shows miss.

The Bad: There can be some pretty out-there episodes. The show takes big swings and while it usually connects, other times it can fall flat on its face. This only ever happens with one-off episodes, though, and the story that connects the characters and themes has been an incredibly solid bedrock for action, jokes, and campy quirkiness.

L E G I O N

Legion

Eps: 106

I'm trying. I really am. I was watching this show as it came out and I just ended up getting further and further behind. I was really excited heading into another Noah Hawley show, having just finished the second season of Fargo, and, in general, finding the idea of a schizophrenic telekinetic mutant to be pretty interesting.

The Good: It looks great. The visual motifs are smart and interesting without being overbearing, and abstract ideas are shown really creatively.

The Bad: I don't know what the f*** is going on in this show. I really don't. I've tried to stay away from the over-analyzing hivemind of the internet that maybe understands what I'm watching, but I know that I have no idea. Sometimes, there's been a glimmer of hope, of clarity, only for it to be snatched away again by another acid trip from hell. It seems to be trying way too hard to appear as though it's not taking itself seriously, like the kids in high school who cared way too much about not caring about anything that anybody else cared about. It's so exhausting that it has taken me weeks to work up the mental energy to try again, only to have my hopes, dreams, and mind melted.



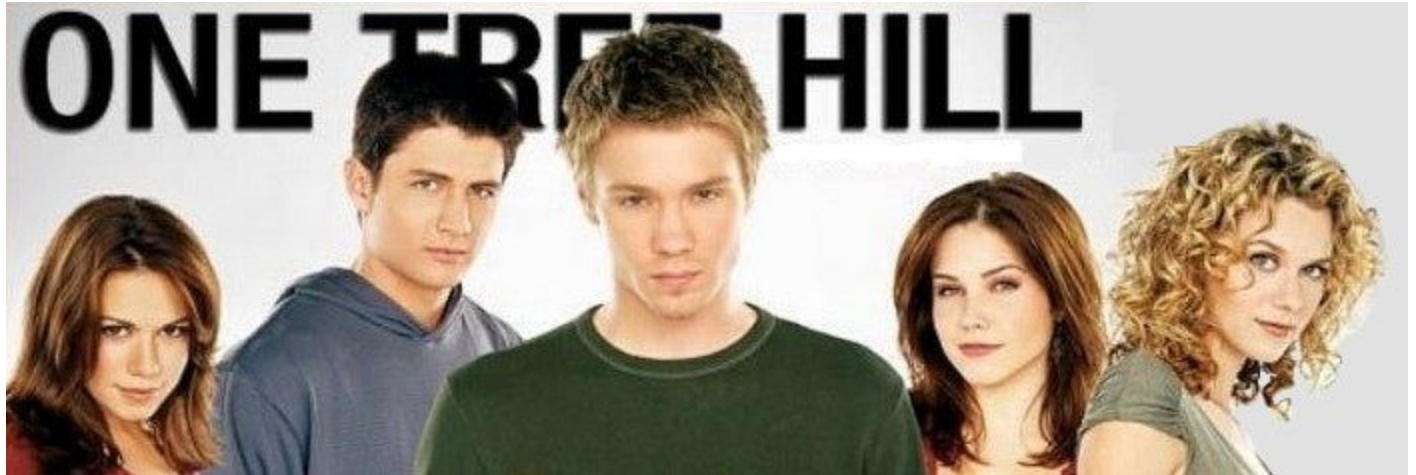
The Americans

Eps: 505–508 (4 total)

I've covered this show on my channel already but I was pretty excited for this season. I thought Season 4 ended very strongly, and now that the show has been renewed through its finale I am looking forward to its new freedom from having to prove itself. Now it can just finish the story it set out to tell.

The Good: My favorite bits of this show are still there, with every character spying on every other character, including themselves, and trying to define their identities. Paige has begun to learn the complexity of this game, while we can see Henry creeping closer and closer to it.

The Bad: I don't have much bad to say, but I've found that it is the slowest season thus far. I don't think that a slow pace is inherently negative, but I do feel as though it must be earned. The hole digging scene from the pilot was a bold choice, and while it didn't completely work for me, it was much, much more successful than I ever would have guessed had I been told that there would be 15 minutes of silence watching a group of people dig an 8 foot hole.



One Tree Hill

Eps: 204-213 (10 total)

We've all been at a place where we needed something more or less mindless to watch. One Tree Hill has been this for me for the past 2-3 months and I was actually surprised to find that I learned a thing or two from it.

The Good: Let me be clear. I do not think One Tree Hill is bad. I do not think One Tree Hill is good. It's okay! Watching it is like eating a bag of chips: you know that it's not particularly good for you and at some point you're kind of sick of them, but you keep getting that dopamine hit and can't put them down until the whole bag is gone. That being said, there are a lot of things about the structure of TV that you can learn from this show. It's kind of comforting to see the machinery of the show on full display, with characters just barely falling short of saying something like, "I'm evil." You can just sit back and see how each character lines up against each other in obvious but organic ways.

The Bad: See the Chip Principle above.



You're The Worst

Eps: 205

I rewatched this episode on my birthday to comfort me as I contemplated my inevitable loss of youth and energy. And you know what, it worked! The jokes in this show never seem to get old for me, and to know that humor can be found in even the darkest of emotional places is better than an escape, it's genuine comfort.



7 Days in Hell

You've probably never heard of this TV movie for HBO, but it's one of my favorite pieces of media ever created. I've watched it too many times to count and it always makes me laugh. It's a mockumentary starring Kit Harrington and Andy Samberg and their epic 7-day tennis match at Wimbledon.

What makes this good is also what makes it bad. Every joke is over the top and every gag is taken to the extreme. But part of why it works is because of its setting in the prim and proper world of English tennis. It's ridiculous, childish, immature, and nonsensical, but it doesn't take anything too seriously, even its myriad of celebrity cameos.



Frasier

Eps: 303-307 (5 total)

I have no idea why I started watching Frasier. I really can't tell you, but I've never not enjoyed an episode. It's a sitcom from another era, where the actors perform largely in 2 or 3 sets on a soundstage and it's much more a play than the modern single camera television shows we see much more of today.

The Good: What shines through the most in this style is the chemistry of the actors. I'm sure the show is edited but the way they play off each other in tangible space gives the show an element of familiarity that we don't see that often these days. We're in the room with them, watching this family quibble just as you do with Uncle George and Aunt Helen every Thanksgiving, only this time laughing out loud is encouraged.

The Bad: The laugh track, painted skyline of Seattle, and stage setting make it a more static show, and it feels like performance art more than film. Looking at it this way, it's easy to imagine how we've gone from this style to modern cable television. It doesn't feel like a representation of life but a play put on for our amusement. Even still, the writing and acting are sharp and witty and I'll be watching this show for a long time.



Veep

Eps: 106–108

I started watching Veep almost a year ago and, while I thought it was funny, other shows ended up taking over my attention.

The Good: What a well-written show. It can be hard to keep up with the pace of the jokes and the politics of this show, but I think that, in large part, that works. Just like following politics on a 24-hour news cycle, so much seems to be happening all the time, and if we pay attention to each little thread it becomes overwhelming. But when you zoom back out, not much has actually happened, and most of it was more symbolic than anything else. Veep basks in the silliness of that pomp and circumstance—satire at its finest.

The Bad: Not all of the jokes have landed in the first season, which is to be expected. I've never really found the first season of a comedy to be its strongest, because I think it takes time to find each character and their dynamics. That being said, I can see the bones of a great show in here, which shouldn't be surprising since Julia Louis-Dreyfus has won about 80 billion Emmys for it (5 for 5 on Best Actress, and 2 more as a producer).