

Written by Tony Timpone  
Friday, 22 October 2010 11:44

---



While the majority of October's horror films have proven box-office disappointments or outright flops (PARANORMAL ACTIVITY 2 and SAW 3D have not opened as I write this), terror on the small screen is doing better than ever. The fifth season premiere of DEXTER, for example, was Showtime's highest rated debut in 15 years, while HBO's TRUE BLOOD also saw its ratings set records last summer. On the CW, SUPERNATURAL has survived the move to Friday nights and seen its viewership jump. While I've never watched an episode of CSI, AMERICAN IDOL or SURVIVOR, you can count on my butt being planted in front of the boob tube when a fright series airs. (Grades for current season only and thus far.)

As addictive as its illicit drug V, TRUE BLOOD (HBO) ended a third season filled with more blood, more sex and more gore than ever before. Actually, it was a little too much "more" of everything. As fun as TRUE BLOOD was this year, creator Alan Ball got carried away big time. A proliferation of subplots deflected too much from Sookie's ongoing story. For example, we already followed bar owner Sam (actor Sam Trammell) meeting his white trash family, did we also need flashbacks to him being a shapeshifting thief? And although I'm a splatter guy, every time one of the vampires died in a geyser of guts and blood, it left me grossed out...but not in a good way. Ditto the scene where Tara (Rutina Wesley) bludgeons the head of sleeping vampire Franklin Mott (James Frain). Things got a little too disgusting. Also, I'm all for gay equality, but TRUE BLOOD overdid that angle too; it seems like every other character on the show is gay now or getting into same sex clinches. It's not fresh anymore, just gratuitous. And the backstory with Sookie (lead Anna Paquin) being part fairy (!) also jumped the shark for me. Here's what salvaged season three: the werewolves (real wolves, not CGI) and the wonderful Denis O'Hare as the villainous Russell Edgington. TRUE BLOOD returns to cable in June. B-



## Tony Timpone's Elegies: TV Terror Report Card

Written by Tony Timpone

Friday, 22 October 2010 11:44

---

After four seasons, Showtime's DEXTER (Sundays at 9 p.m.) is still kickin' ass. This series, about a serial killer (the superb Michael C. Hall) who targets other serial killers, just keeps getting better and better. Last year's cat and mouse games between Dexter and his ultimate foe, the Trinity Killer (an unforgettable John Lithgow), emerged as electrifying drama (especially the Thanksgiving Day dinner blowup in "Hungry Man"), culminating (SPOILER ALERT) in the shocking and unexpected murder of Dexter's wife Rita (Julie Benz). Season five has picked up the threads beautifully, with Dexter believably mourning his loss, raising a baby and getting back to old habits. The show's new storylines—Dexter dealing with the survivor (Julia Stiles) of one of his victims, vicious cult murders and the suspicions of co-worker Joey (Desmond Harrington going all Doakes on Dexter)—make one count the days to each new episode. Feature film directors like JOY RIDE's John Dahl and DEMON KNIGHT's Ernest Dickerson, as well as a top-notch writing team (among the scribes, THE SOPRANOS/THE SHIELD vet James Manos Jr.) keep DEXTER edgy, dark and exciting on a consistent basis. A



Fox's FRINGE (Thursdays at 9 p.m.) also boasts a few movie directors doing top-notch TV work, like Brad Anderson (THE MACHINIST and SESSION 9) and Joe Chappelle (atoning for the sixth HALLOWEEN film and PHANTOMS). Created by that smart, innovative powerhouse of J.J. Abrams, Alex Kurtzman and Roberto Orci (LOST, ALIAS, new STAR TREK), FRINGE—about FBI agents investigating strange phenomena—could have been just another X FILES knockoff, but a terrific cast, outlandish stories and gruesome makeup FX (liquefied brains, tumor-ravaged faces, genetic mutants, overgrown parasites, etc.) have helped FRINGE find its own unique footing. In the program's early days, its crazy science had just a sliver of plausibility. Not anymore, as season three has taken us deep into the alternative Earth, with shapeshifters running around and bizarre technology right off the pure sci-fi shelf. Fortunately, the wonderful performers (Anna Torv, Joshua Jackson and especially John Noble as the nutty LSD-dropping lead scientist) keep FRINGE grounded and always entertaining to watch. I love how the writers think outside the box, like the episode this month told from the POV of the lead characters' doppelgangers ("Plateau") or the one where our sympathies are engendered for an evil family man shapeshifter ("Do Shapeshifters Dream of Electric Sheep?"). FRINGE is scary, fast-paced and unpretentious. Unlike X FILES, which kept tripping over its muddled mythology, FRINGE gets more interesting as it goes on. B+

## Tony Timpone's Elegies: TV Terror Report Card

Written by Tony Timpone

Friday, 22 October 2010 11:44

---



When it comes to the CW, the landscape of sci-fi series elevated to the status of talk-of-the-town shows is