

TV Review: Sunday Nights on FOX Showing Serious Creative Fatigue

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on September 30, 2012 - 11:10am

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CHICAGO – With shows like “Archer” and a still-creative “South Park” leading the way in TV animation along with all of the fascinating risks being taken by Adult Swim, what are we to make of a Sunday night lineup on FOX that feels more creatively stagnant than ever? There are still some laughs to be had here after a long day of drinking to the rhythm of professional football but none of the shows are at their peak and it feels like the night needs something new to force everyone to up their game. And, no, it’s not “Bob’s Burgers.”

Which is not to say that “Bob’s” is a “bad” show. None of the animated offerings that kick off the new Animation Domination block on Sunday on FOX are anything less than mediocre. And there’s something numbing about watching all four season premieres in a short period of time (and an October episode of “The Cleveland Show” didn’t elevate the entire experience by much). Every single one has a laugh or two (and the season premieres of “The Simpsons” and “Family Guy,” easily the best two programs in this line-up have more than two) but one can’t help shake the sensation that this animated block needs something new. It feels like if something as daring and straight-up brilliant as “Archer” could serve as the centerpiece, it could really raise the whole night. Now it feels mostly like FOX and the creative teams behind these projects are treading water. Show by show, in the order they premiere...

(Note: “The Cleveland Show” returns next week, October 7 at 7:30pm CST in a night of Halloween-themed episodes over three weeks before the actual holiday...nice work FOX.)



The Simpsons

Photo credit: FOX

“The Simpsons”



Television Rating: **3.0/5.0**

On the 24th season premiere of one of the best programs in the history of television (called “Moonshine River”), Bart comes to the startling discovery (with a little help from his sister Lisa) that he’s a bit difficult to love. Why can’t Bart can’t keep a girlfriend? And so the entire family travels to New York City to track down Cletus’ daughter Mary (Zoey Deschanel, who also voiced the character in the 17th season episode “Apocalypse Cow”), the one girl who may still love the iconic character.

As “The Simpsons” has been in recent years, “Moonshine River” is a bit inconsistent on a plotting level but I’ll admit that there’s an energy here that’s been somewhat absent in recent season premieres. I still miss the days when “The Simpsons” writers were remotely interested in creating consistent characters that riffed on the modern family instead of just turning in on itself in a barrage of pop culture but if the show is

going to crib the more manic style of the Seth MacFarlane brand, it's at least nice to see it doing so with a few good solid laughs. Does this mean "The Simpsons" is rebounding from a few bad years? It's too soon to say for sure but I will say that this season premiere is the best of the last several. Maybe there's a second wind for this show yet. Or should that be third, fourth, or fifth wind?



Bob's Burgers

Photo credit: FOX

"Bob's Burgers"

Television Rating: **3.0/5.0**

On the 3rd season premiere of "Bob's Burgers," "Ears-y Rider," the writers find a way to blend biker humor into this show's unique approach to comedy. A gang of Hell's Angels types ride through town and look like they could cause significant problems for the locals, including Bob and his family, but they turn out to be the safety net when Louise struggles with her own issues after her bunny ears are stolen. Yes, bunny ears and bikers. At least they get points for originality.

Why don't I love "Bob's Burgers"? Much like "The Cleveland Show," it's a modest, smile-inducing affair that just doesn't take enough creative risks and doesn't have the creative spark of the best animated TV. I don't begrudge anyone who loves it (and I know you're out there...I've received the emails) but it's one of those programs that passes by without much actual laughter or memorable moments. When it's done, I can barely remember having watched it. So, it's not bad enough to stick out as something worth reviling but it's not good enough to stand out positively either. After a long day of drinking and watching football, it's the show that I'm guessing most people fall asleep to on Sunday nights.



Family Guy

Photo credit: FOX

"Family Guy"

Television Rating: **3.5/5.0**

What's left to do when you've completely run out of ideas? Climb Mount Everest! Seriously, this had to be one of those plots that served as an eternal Plan B. "OK, let's try that idea, but if it doesn't work the Griffins are going to fight with another family and challenge them to climb

Mt. Everest. You KNOW we don't want to write that." I'm mostly kidding but there's no way that anyone could argue that Seth MacFarlane's greatest hit doesn't feel at least a bit like it is running on an empty tank of creative fumes as the eleventh season begins. However, could the increased popularity of the man whose star has never been brighter after the success of "Ted" and his turn hosting "Saturday Night Live" inject this show with some life?

Maybe. I'm never going to count "Family Guy" out entirely and there are still more laughs here than any of the other programs this evening. I'm just a bit harder on the Griffins because of how fantastic this show used to be. I really want it to get back to that creative peak where every joke felt inspired and original. They don't find that lost spark on top of Mt. Everest but one gets the impression that they haven't yet given up looking.



American Dad
Photo credit: FOX

“American Dad”



Television Rating: 2.0/5.0

Roger opens a crooner's bar in the Smith family attic and you better LOVE the effeminate alien who sounds like a Charles Nelson Reilly impression if you're going to make it through the season premiere of easily the worst show in the Sunday night FOX lineup. Roger hires Hayley to sing in his bar and falls in love with and the laughs just don't come.

I've been forgiving of "American Dad" in the past because it felt like MacFarlane and his team here were stretching different creative muscles than on "Family Guy" but those muscles have torn and broken. First, Roger should NEVER be the lead. It's Stan's show. Roger is a supporting character and he's too grating for his own arc. Second, the jokes here just feel uninspired and overly familiar. There's an energy missing from this entire evening that a new hit could bring to the whole line-up. And this is the obvious cancellation to open up a time slot for something new. Imagine if one of Cartoon Network's twisted comedies or something like "Archer" filled this spot instead. It would bring a different energy to the whole night. For now, it just feels like FOX is spinning its animated wheels.

"The Simpsons," "Bob's Burgers," "Family Guy," and "American Dad" return on FOX on Sunday, September 30, 2012, starting at 7pm CST. "The Cleveland Show" returns at 6:30pm CST on Sunday, October 7, 2012.



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