Swerbs Blurbs entertainment guru Mitch Cyrus is back, this time with Part II of his review of the new fall television season. After hitting on a slew of shows in Part I (linked inside), Mitch focuses on four shows in Part II. "Dexter", "The Nine", "Jericho", and "Friday Night Lights". Enjoy.

*Click here for Part I of Mitch's review of the new TV season*

In this second part of my look at the new shows on the boob tube this season, I'll be looking at three series that had not yet premiered at the time the first one came out; "The Nine", "Friday Night Lights", and "Dexter". I was also going to look at "Kidnapped", but it's already been executed, in the form of being shoved off to Saturday nights until the 13 episodes of this arc have run their course. So I'll take a look at one show that does seem to be succeeding, "Jericho".

As usual for new shows, the Ratings Gods are not kind. "Smith", which received a pretty high grade from me, has been cancelled after three episodes. I'm not totally shocked at this. The biggest problem with "Smith" is that none of the criminals were the least bit sympathetic. It's hard to garner much empathy for a group that callously execute a rent-a-cop making $12 an hour at a museum.

As stated in the first article, the networks love nothing more than creating copycats, and this year the most popular formula was crime thrillers with continuing storylines, ala "24" and "Prison Break". Enough is evidently enough for the public, and they have tuned out of the formulaic cops and robbers type shows. The two that have succeeded already, "Jericho" and "Heroes" each have a unique hook; nuclear holocaust and superheroes respectively. Both "The Nine" and "Dexter" also have skewered viewpoints regarding crime, as I will explain.

**Dexter**

Showtime, Sundays at 10 PM.

This is, beyond compare, the best show on television right now (one caveat as “24”, “Deadwood”, and “The Sopranos” are currently not airing). The recent advent of shows featuring anti-heroes originated on cable with Tony Soprano, extending on through Al Swearengen in “Deadwood”, Dr. Christian Troy in “Nip/Tuck”, and Detective Vick Mackey in “The Shield”. Now Showtime takes the anti-hero to a new level; a sympathetic serial killer named Dexter (Michael C. Hall).

Why is a serial killer sympathetic? Because he is a killer with a heart of gold. His beloved foster father, a police detective (James Remar in frequent flash-back scenes), recognized his sickness early in his life, and spent the next several years honing Dexter’s skills in investigative work, and in covering his tracks. His father knows that the young Dexter needs to kill, and will eventually turn to killing humans, so he convinces him to turn his murderous desires into something “acceptable”; killing only “bad” people. The adult Dexter is a forensic expert at the Miami-Dade police department (a much different look than seen on “CSI: Miami”), which gives him enough access to track down scum who have somehow “beat the system”, and make them pay for their crimes (and quite gruesomely at that). And you get no sympathy for Dexter’s victims. In the first three shows he dispatches a child molester/killer, a snuff film maker, a multiple DUI killer, and a serial killer nurse.

This is a very tricky balancing act, and it is doubtful that it could be pulled off except for the talents of Michael C. Hall, in a role that is completely the opposite of the uptight gay funeral director he played in “Six Feet Under”. In Dexter’s numerous self-deprecating voice-overs, he describes himself as a “monster, incapable of human emotion”. To complete his façade of normalcy, he even has a girlfriend, one who has been so traumatized by the abuse suffered at the hands of her ex-husband that she is afraid of having sex. This is perfect for Dexter, as he disdains any human contact that doesn’t involve sharp instruments.

However, Dexter's veneer of monster-dom has a few cracks. It is obvious that he cares deeply for his younger foster sister, a police detective working with him. And his dealings with both his girlfriend Rita, and her two young children show not a man hiding behind an act, but someone trying desperately to convince himself that it is an act, so he doesn't have to deal with the real compassion within him.

The arc throughout the 13 episode season is another serial killer, labeled "The Ice Truck Killer" by the media, who drains his victims (usually hookers) of blood, and then chops them into several pieces. The killer has broken into Dexter's apartment, and recognizes him as a kindred spirit. So the cat and mouse game is on, with Dexter trying to help catch him, while at the same time keeping his deep secrets under wraps.

Dark, edgy, and stylish, the show also has a cutting sense of gallows humor. It also has an excellent supporting cast, all of them with almost as many psychoses and secrets as the title character. Sunday nights have been THE night I've looked forward to for over a year; the home of "Six Feet Under", "Rome", "The Sopranos", and "Deadwood". With another several months to wait until the last eight episodes of Tony and the gang, it's good to have another masterpiece in this prime slot.

Preliminary Grade: A+

**The Nine**

ABC, Wednesdays at 10 PM

We've seen shows about hostage situations hundreds of times. The always focus on either the cops or the robbers, or both (see also; "Inside Man"). This one takes the unique viewpoint

of focusing on the victims.

As the pilot begins, we see all the major characters entering a bank near closing time for different reasons, most strangers to each other. Two gunmen enter, knock out the guard, lock the doors, and proceed to tell everyone that it will all be over in five minutes.

The next scene shows that 52 hours have passed as the SWAT team breaks in, kills one gunman, and rescues the remaining nine hostages. However, one later dies in the operating room, a young woman working as a teller along side her sister, leaving behind a young child. The first thing an off-duty cop who was one of the hostages does when he gets out is to slug the FBI negotiator for his handling of the crisis.

So we have the beginning, and the end, but we see very little of what actually went on during those 52 hours. That will be the gist of the show this season as the nine survivors deal with the aftermath. But wait a second! Didn't I just say that one of the Nine remaining hostages died? Yes, I did, and that is the first little misdirection of the show, as the show will follow not just the Eight that lived, but also the robber that survived, as there is more to him than meets the eye. When the SWAT team broke in, one of the hostages risked his life in tackling the "good" robber, not to disarm him, but to save him from the cops' bullets.

The fact that this show follows ABC's hit "Lost" is not coincidental, as it is a similar show in regards to being a mystery that will slowly unravel over time as to what really happened inside the bank. The main "hero" is the nearly disgraced cop (Tim Daly) who must now battle his own department in their effort to sweep their incompetence under the rug. In that effort, he's aided by an assistant District Attorney (Kim Raver, who will probably not be back as Audrey Rains in the next season of "24"), who happens to be the girlfriend of the County District Attorney. There is also a surgeon (Scott Wolfe, which means it'll only be a matter of time before fellow "Party of Five" castmates join him and Lost's Matthew Fox as surgeons on their own series), and his girlfriend, a hospital social worker. She was about to tell him that she's pregnant, but evidently something went on between the good doc and the teller, which has caused the happy couple to split.

Luckily, this does not play out with as much intentional confusion as “Lost”. But it is still to be seen if this type of drama will have any legs left after the details from the robbery have been revealed. I have my doubts in that regard, but for now I’ll just sit back and enjoy what may end up being a good One-Season-Only show.

Preliminary Grade: B+

**Jericho**

CBS. Wednesdays at 8 PM

Somehow, I can’t stop the R.E.M. lyrics “It’s the end of the world, and I feel fine” out of my mind when thinking about this show. Not that anyone really feels that fine now that they’ve just seen a mushroom cloud go up over Denver, but it is one of those times that they are glad they chose to live their lives in some Podunk-ville instead of the big city.

Skeet Ulrich stars as Jake Green, the prodigal son returning to a small west Kansas town to collect his inheritance and then hit the road again. He does take off again, but not the way he planned after a confrontation with his father, who is also the mayor (Gerald McRaney, building on his terrific performance as George Hearst in “Deadwood”). But after the Big Boom, things work out a little differently, as Jake manages to be a hero to a bus load of school children lost out of town. Jake is quite the mystery, as we don’t seem to know much about his background, which might include medical school based upon his bus heroics (or maybe he just watched a lot of “ER” episodes). Regardless, he assumes a leadership role in the town as contact with the outside world has been severed, and no one knows what is happening.

There are probably not that many people who have read the insightful 1959 Pat Frank novel “Alas, Babylon”. Because if you have, then you know that this is pretty much the same thing,

just with a touch of “Lost” (again!) and “Invasion” added to it in the form of mysterious outsiders who may want to do harm to our town of good-guys. In the ways that the show emulates the novel, it succeeds, as the book depicted the social breakdowns and panic that would occur in a small town in the aftermath of nuclear destruction to major metropolitan areas; this time in Kansas as opposed to the small town in Florida for “Alas, Babylon” (since ABC tried using South Florida as the base of operations for “Invasion”, it’s good that they changed it).

It also blatantly rips off a sub plot of the book, having a bus load of criminals getting loose as well to reap more havoc upon the locals…a plot device that seemed a bit contrived in the show.

Where it doesn’t work is as a family soap opera. Quite frankly, in the aftermath of nuclear war, I really don’t give a rat’s ass about how Jake’s daddy didn’t hug him enough, or why he split up with his hottie girlfriend. As Bogey says, “the problems of three little people don’t amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world.”

The trick with mysteries such as this is keeping the audience enthralled in the story line without giving up too much at one time, while simultaneously keeping some level of plausibility. “Twin Peaks” was a classic example of how to make it work…and then how to fail. Season One of the quirky “before-its-time” mystery hit all the right buttons…but things fell apart in the second year as it got more and more ludicrous, to the point that in the end, only David Lynch’s immediate family were still watching it.

That is the danger for this show. There is so much potential here as a sociological thriller, but if it goes too far off into conspiracy-land tangents with Cigarette-smoking agents pulling bullshit games, then it is doomed for failure.

Preliminary Grade: B

**Friday Night Lights**

NBC, Tuesdays at 8 PM.

Out of all the attempts at intense adult entertainment from the networks this season, “Friday Night Lights” stands out as the only semi-family friendly entry. And as it’s turning out after a few episodes, this is the show that most of the “serious” critics are rallying behind, berating viewers for not watching “the best new show this year”.

Boo-freaking-hoo.

I hate to say it, but the show sucks six week old rotten eggs. There is NOTHING in this you haven’t seen in “Varsity Blues”, “Remember the Titans”, or the movie version of “Friday Night Lights”, which was vastly superior to this lame effort.

There is not a single cliché that is not used for this tripe. You have the jive talking black running back, the hard drinking loser of a fullback, a hot shot superstar quarterback, a bookwormish daughter of the head coach, slutty girls dragging down players, overly peppy clueless cheerleaders, smarmy car salesmen pressuring the coach, a tough talking lady mayor telling players to get mean, gabby housewives, and an entire town that needs to get a friggin’ life and stop elevating 16 – 18 year old boys to the point that they are the only things that matter in their dull, dreary lives.

The games themselves are painful to watch, especially for anyone that actually understands football. The “soon to be better than Roger Staubach” QB breaks his neck late in the very first game (in a tackle that could not have possibly broken the guy’s fingernail, let alone a vertebrae), so the only backup on the team, a shy, spindly sophomore, of course comes on the field and

wins The Big Game by scoring two touchdowns in 54 seconds, the last one coming when the other team's defense totally forgets all concepts of the game, and allows a WR to get 15 yards behind the secondary.

The sad thing is that there is not a sympathetic character on the entire show. You might feel sorry for the young QB after "Loser" was spray painted on the sign in front of his grandma's shotgun shack house after a loss, but you're too busy rolling your eyes knowing that no one with a brain could possibly blame the kid for busting two tackles and getting stopped at the one yard line for a loss in the second game after his heroics in game one. As far as the rest of the characters…zilch in the personality department. Even the center of the show, head coach Eric Taylor (Kyle Chandler), is such a clueless wuss that you don't care what happens to him. One day he's acting all fatherly to the young QB, the next he's putting the entire team on a bus AT MIDNIGHT to run wind sprints up and down a hill in a driving rainstorm. Yet, instead of the players telling Coach Sadist to shove it, they all bond, and start chanting pithy team slogans while finishing their impromptu workout.

After watching three episodes of this garbage, the only thing I am grateful for is having TiVo, so instead of wasting three hours of my life, it was more like two hours and twenty minutes.

Preliminary Grade: D-