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# Why South Park Has Been A Cultural Rorschach Test For 25 Years

BY [BJ COLANGELO](#) / AUG. 10, 2022 8:00 AM EST

Somewhere in my parents' attic, there's a dusty VHS tape featuring a New Year's Eve marathon of "[South Park](#)" recorded off the TV, with bursts of footage of "KaBLAM!!" from when I flipped to Nickelodeon so my grandma wouldn't know what I was watching. When my elementary school sent out a warning to parents about an "animated show not safe for children," my parents immediately took a "don't tell me how to raise my kid" stance, and we watched it together. The way they saw it, refusing access would only make me want it more, and at least this way, they'd be there to answer any questions I had and have an idea of what words I'd been learning. I have few conscious memories of a life before "South Park" and unlike most of the kids I grew up with, I was never denied whatever vulgar nonsense Stan, Kyle, Kenny, and Cartman were getting into.



franchise rewatch. I'm talking, every episode, the feature film, the streaming specials, the documentary, the video games, and I even watched show creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone's non-"South Park" films, and listened to "The Book of Mormon." (*I have seen the stage show multiple times*). Given how influential "South Park" was in my formative years, it felt vital to go back and rewatch everything from an educated, nuanced, and most importantly, adult perspective. I braced myself to feel embarrassed or \*gasp\* offended.

Instead, I came out the other side viewing "South Park" as culture's greatest Rorschach test.

## 25 years of cultural shifts



No other show on television has ever been as decidedly polarizing as "South Park." Since the show's debut in 1997, the filthy satire starring elementary schoolers set in the quiet, mountain town of South Park, Colorado has been partitioning audiences for two and half decades. As a kid, "good" parents were the ones who banned "South Park" from their homes and "bad" parents were the ones like mine, who taught their kids what an "anal probe" was. 25 years later, these antithetical viewpoints have ballooned to "best comedy in TV history" to "this show is responsible for the alt-right." The show cut its teeth with an unflinching approach to cultural commentary, making fun of anyone and anything in a time when



Now, in a post-Trump era, those same conservatives are the ones who have weaponized the right to free speech as a way to persecute and invoke legitimate harm to marginalized communities. The late '90s and early '00s were all about preaching equality, allowing "South Park" to fire off their barbs with reckless abandon because everyone was treated equally as fair play. Decades later, the "nothing is off limits" approach of "South Park" isn't as easy to navigate. The cultural conversation around comedy has evolved with the understanding we should be focusing on equity, rather than equality, and punching down is lazy. Of course, plenty of comedians refuse to get on board, but despite popular belief, "South Park" isn't one of them.

## The show plays both sides ... or does it?



I fell off watching "South Park" consistently when I started high school, feeling some kind of way about how casually the show described most things as "gay" while trying to unpack my own identity. The straw that broke the camel's back was the election episode "Douche and Turd." The story pits two mascot opponents against one another, and I walked away furious that anyone could dare believe the right and left were "equally bad." I felt betrayed. How could "South Park" believe the left was on the same level as the right, especially when they had always been on the side of progress with social issues?



Douche and Turd isn't an episode positioning both sides as being equally bad, it's an episode about how the American two-party system is broken. Stan spends the entire episode not wanting to vote because he doesn't like either candidate, but ultimately in the end decides to cast a ballot, knowing that he's going to be stuck with whoever wins regardless. It took me living through the 2020 election to finally "get it." As a lesbian married to a trans woman, there was no way in hell I was voting for the giant douche, instead giving my vote to the turd sandwich. I didn't want either candidate, but at least the one I chose presents their capitalist conservatism with a performative hashtag and rainbow font. But even making a declarative statement of what the episode is *really* about is futile, because the legacy of "South Park" is not in its literal content, but how it is interpreted.

## Where do Parker and Stone actually stand?



The ideology of "South Park" has been hotly debated for decades. Conservatives believe their takedowns of political correctness place the show on their side, while liberals have pointed to the show's history of groundbreaking progressiveness as a sign that the show is firmly left leaning. Parker and Stone's own political ideologies have also been heavily debated, with Stone's infamous response on an online fan forum of "I hate conservatives, but I really f\*\*\*\*\* hate liberals," oft cited as proof that the two are libertarians. The duo have said many times that the libertarian label is not entirely appropriate, and given their reputation for



We can speculate, for sure, but for all we know, Parker and Stone are anarchists laughing their butts off as we try to categorize them. Their refusal to "pick a side" has been frustrating for a lot of viewers, who consistently accuse them of trying to "play both sides." In a [2004 interview](#), New York Times writer Sharon Waxman called the lack of taking a stance childish and asked "doesn't anything matter?" To which Parker retorted, "That's not our job, our job is making fun of stuff." After this full franchise rewatch, I've realized that the intentions behind Parker and Stone's commentary doesn't actually matter. People watching the show are going to see and take from it what they want, regardless of what the duo says or how it's presented. Their job is to make fun of stuff. Our job is to figure out what it means to us, personally.

## Set atop an impossible pedestal



Given the six-day turnaround of every episode, the show has been able to provide timely commentary on current events, but this extremely fast turnaround time doesn't allow for their satirical comments to be as meaningful as they are entertaining. This is likely why their made-for-streaming movies [on Paramount+](#) have been so well received, because the story wasn't limited by the rapid turnaround. Despite that, "South Park" has been continually treated by critics and culture writers alike as a measuring stick for the current state of the culture wars. The New York Times published "[How 'South Park' Perfectly Captures Our Era of Outrage](#)" and



establishing an impossible standard for all involved and only setting up viewers for frustration and disappointment when the show fails to meet the standards it never asked for.

Outside of late night talk shows or political commentary shows like "The Daily Show" and "Last Week Tonight," "South Park" is unique in its ability to produce a show with immediate commentary. This isn't to say Parker and Stone deserve a pass for all of the times their commentary missed the mark or contributed to genuinely harmful discourse, but believing a highly controversial show is going to nail it 100% of the time with 300-plus episodes and a dramatically shifting social climate is an unreasonable and unfair barometer to maintain. It's also a caliber its contemporaries have never been pressured to sustain. To quote Tweek, "That's way too much pressure, you guys."

## SIMPSONS DID IT!



Even though similar shows like "The Simpsons" or "Family Guy" have been on the air for many, many years, neither show has been defined by their worst moments the way "South Park" often is. The cultural conversations about all three shows are entirely different. When someone says "Oh, I love 'The Simpsons,'" our brains immediately imagine the golden years of the series, when seemingly everyone on Earth was a fan.



"South Park," the reaction sparks an assumption of the person's character, because the unspoken cultural agreement surrounding the show is "'South Park' is problematic ... SO THIS PERSON CLEARLY CONDONES THAT!" Not only does this mentality relegate the legacy of "South Park" to its most offensive missteps, but it allows fans to ignore or disassociate shows like "The Simpsons" from their own less-than-spotless histories.

I don't have the answer as to why this phenomenon exists nor will I pretend to know the exact answer, but I do have a theory. Given the controversial history of "South Park," and how public perception of the show has shifted wildly as culture has progressed, it's become the standard and not the exception to assume that all of the satire presented on "South Park" was crafted in bad faith. It's as if people believe Matt and Trey are sitting around in a writer's thinktank deciding "who should we make fun of this week?," despite what "6 Days to Air" and former writers have attested. That's not how things actually run at South Park Studios.

## The Rorschach Test



I came across a quote from Matt Stone from an interview with the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, where he said, "Believe it or not, we consider 'South Park' to be art, and art should be a Rorschach Test. It should be an examination of our own emotions." I can't stop thinking about how accurate of a description a Rorschach Test is to describe "South Park," given the way



"Apologies to Jesse Jackson." The episode focuses on Randy Marsh, who while competing on "Wheel of Fortune," is given the category "People Who Annoy You" and the letters "N, G, G, E, R, S." The inevitable answer is, of course, "Niggers," but that is not what Randy confidentially screams on live television.

The episode has been vehemently debated, with many viewing the episode as blatantly racist, while at the same time, the episode has been praised by civil rights groups and been the topic of academic analysis regarding white fragility/anxiety. Kovon and Jill Flowers, who co-founded the organization Abolish the "N" Word, were cited on an episode of Paula Zahn Now in defense of the episode's usage, and praising the way the satire could be used as an educational moment. But marginalized people are not a monolith, so one organization's praise of the episode should not and does not negate the criticisms of other people, which continues to prove the Rorschach Test comparison — we see what we see, regardless of Matt and Trey's intent.

## Cartman has never been a hero



This Rorschach Test is both a blessing and a curse, as I firmly believe the biggest problem "South Park" has is not in the content it presents, but in the way the content has been received. Since the show's pilot episode, Eric Cartman has consistently been presented as a



Stone crafted "South Park" with the belief that the people who would gravitate toward the show were as intelligent as they were, and thereby would be able to pick up on the satire of the show.

Unfortunately, as we've come to learn, people are *idiots*. That might sound harsh, but take a second and think about that guy you knew in 2003 who constantly quoted Cartman in response to real life situations. He's the same dude who currently thinks there are microchips in the COVID-19 vaccine, isn't he? So many people got hung up on "RESPECT MY AUTHORITYAH" being one of the most quotable lines from the late '90s that they forgot this is a character who murders a couple (*one of which is his biological father*) and tricks their son into cannibalising his own parents in a bowl of chili. Cartman has never been portrayed on "South Park" as anything other than a monster, but that didn't stop from a bunch of people from confusing "protagonist" with "hero" and parroting his bigoted remarks.

## Sometimes the audience IS smarter



At the same time, there are plenty of people watching and consuming "South Park" who, quite often, know more what they're talking about regarding specific topics than Matt and Trey. The commentary the show makes is reactionary by the nature of the production schedule, and to believe two disgustingly wealthy, cisgender heterosexual white dudes in their 50s



call them out on it. The entire 2005 run of "Mrs. Garrison," (in which Mr. Garrison briefly underwent gender affirming surgery to live as a trans woman) was a whopping miss, but the 2014 episode "The Cissy," showed that they clearly learned from their past mistakes regarding transgender representation.

This rough track record has led to a sense of distrust for a lot of people, which is completely understandable. When you genuinely know more about a topic that people with a financial empire are parodying in the name of entertainment, it feels unnecessary to tune in. There are also those who are living every single day in a world where their existence has been turned into political bargaining chips (myself included) and sometimes the last thing you need is to hear what someone outside of your identity "has to say" about your identity. I don't bemoan anyone for not watching "South Park," but I also don't subscribe to the idea that I'm somehow a "bad gay" for believing the show still has merit after all these years.

## The power in a lack of politeness



There's an old adage tossed around comedy circles that says "dare to suck," which is the idea that it's better to throw a wild swing and miss spectacularly because even if you don't nail it, you'll at least be entertaining. "South Park" often falls underneath this umbrella for me, because even when they attempt a dive and wind-up belly flopping, it is a lot more valuable to



really good at expressing why it's a problem that we've become so fixated on the presentation of an argument, rather than the actual content. The entire character of PC Principal is a play on those that are more interested in policing language than enacting actual systemic change. Later in the season, Jimmy's nemesis Nathan has a throwaway line that has been haunting me for weeks:

**"What is PC but a verbal form of gentrification? Spruce everything up, get rid of all the ugliness in order to create a false sense of paradise."**

The quote was used in reference to the way corporations and brands have developed socially conscious identities as a means to manipulate capitalism for their benefit, but the expression feels like an awfully poignant way to analyze "South Park" as a whole. Is the problem the message they're sending, or is the problem how they're sending it? Rorschach Test. *Do you see?*

## It's gotten harder to laugh in this world



As is the case with any anniversary, Parker & Stone have been doing a lot of their own assessment of the show's legacy. "It does feel like we used to be punk rockers flipping off the principal, and now we're old men telling people, "Get off my lawn!" Stone told the [LA Times](#). "For us, it's material. The world changes. It's interesting." The show has never strayed away from meta-commentary, with the season 15 episode "You're Getting Old" continuing to be (in my opinion) the most thought provoking and timeless entry in the show's history. It was the moment they let audiences in on a little behind-the-scenes feelings about growing older, becoming out of touch with the current coolness, and how cynicism poisons our perspectives.

The episode deeply resonated with me in a way I wasn't prepared to have to unpack, as nearly three years of living in a pandemic and a fresh new hell awaiting beneath every Twitter trending moment has made it really hard to laugh at anything these days. "They think that if you find humor in something, that means you don't care about it," Parker said in the same LA Times interview. "But the truth is, I've spent more time in a room analyzing and processing things through comedy with Matt than I do going out and talking through something with a therapist."

I talked with my therapist about "You're Getting Old" the day after I watched it.

## My own Rorschach Test



The cruel irony in writing this retrospective is that this article alone serves as its own Rorschach Test. There will be those who read this and believe I'm being too kind to the show and its creators while others will find my criticisms "too woke," regardless of how I *actually* feel. And what I actually feel... is complicated. I can't go back in time and make "South Park" impactless on my existence, I can't make the episodes that aged like unrefrigerated hot dogs left in a hot car suddenly share the sentiments of a 2022 perspective, and honestly, I'm glad that I can't. Rewatching "South Park" was a sometimes gut-bustingly funny, sometimes incredibly painful trip back in time, but I'd be lying if I said I didn't take away far more good from my rewatch than I did bad. If I'm being honest, Butters perfectly describes how I feel about it all after he finds out the Raisins girl he thought he was dating was only being nice to him for tips:

**“Well yeah, I'm sad, but at the same time I'm really happy that something could make me feel that sad. It's like, it makes me feel alive, you know? It makes me feel human. And the only way I could feel this sad now is if I felt somethin' really good before.”**



honest (*yes, problematic feelings can be honest*) place. "South Park" might as well be the Library of Alexandria of cultural commentary, even if half of the books are just pages of poop jokes. No matter how badly some people want to burn it to the ground, it would be a detriment to society to erase the undeniable impact it has had on pop culture.

## RECOMMENDED



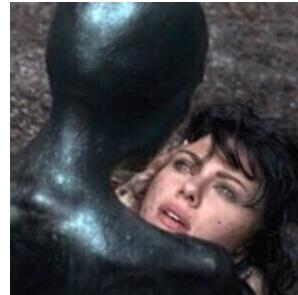
The Tragedy Of Mayim Bialik Just Gets Sadder And Sadder



This Dodgeball Actress Is Drop-Dead Gorgeous In Real Life



Trachtenberg's Cause Of Death Has Been Officially Revealed



The Deeply Disturbing Film That Made Our Stomachs Turn

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# The 10 Best South Park Episodes No One Remembers

BY [BJ COLANGELO](#) / AUG. 3, 2022 2:00 PM EST



"South Park" turns 25 this year, and for some godforsaken reason, I felt the best way to celebrate would be to binge watch the feature film, play the video games, check out the Paramount+ made-for-TV specials, and consume all TWENTY-FIVE SEASONS of television. Hey, I never said I made good decisions with my free time. Admittedly, I've learned an awful lot by comin' down to South Park and havin' myself a time, and I'm happy to pass on what I've learned with all of you, my dear /Film readers. We've already [ranked](#) the best seasons and [characters](#) as we reflect on two and a half decades of debauchery, but what about the greatness time forgot?

There are plenty of classic "South Park" episodes that are universally praised by fans and critics alike, but there are also some deep-cut episodes that aren't often brought up in these "Best of" discussions that absolutely deserve their place. By and large, these are 10 of the best "South Park" episodes that no one remembers. Not you, though. You remember. Of course.

## Proper Condom Use



Sex education in American public schools is a joke in and of itself, but "South Park" pushes it to new heights with "Proper Condom Use." Cartman and Kenny are tricked by the fifth graders into believing it's possible to "milk" a dog, when in reality, they're just stimulating a dog until it ejaculates. The two show Stan and Kyle what they've learned, which Stan executes in front of his parents and all of their friends to all of their horror. Stan is grounded for months despite not understanding what he did wrong, and since all of the parents are too embarrassed to teach their kids about sex, they tell the school it is their responsibility.

Unfortunately, Mr. Mackey hasn't had sex in over 20 years so his instruction to the boys is totally useless, and Ms. Choksondik terrifies the girls with graphic descriptions of sexually transmitted diseases without actually explaining that the conditions are passed through sexual intercourse. This leads to a "Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior" inspired showdown between the boys and girls, convinced that the opposite gender is going to give them STDs. People typically remember bits from this episode like Mr. Mackey and Ms. Choksondik having sex and Mr. Garrison teaching the kindergarteners how to apply condoms in the most Mr. Garrison way possible. The episode ends with Chef highlighting how the children have been failed by both the parents and teachers, which is the same unfortunate reality for most kids across the country.

## Royal Pudding



Any Ike-centric "South Park" episode is a winner in my book, and "Royal Pudding" is no exception. At the time of its release, critics disliked the episode, with The A.V. Club calling it, "one of the series' strangest half-hours." The story centers on the Canadian Royal Wedding, complete with nonsensical Canadian royal "traditions" like the Prince of Canada shoving the dismembered arm of his bride-to-be up his anus. The ridiculousness of it all is a way to parody the pretension of the British royal weddings. After the future princess is kidnapped mid-ceremony, all Canadians are called upon to help in bringing her back, which puts Ike on a quest for adventure.

The episode feels like a callback to season 1 episodes like "Volcano!" with the introduction of the Tooth Decay monster feeling an awful lot like Scuzzlebutt. "Royal Pudding" is absurdist "South Park" humor at its best, and offers some great moments for Mr. Mackey as he slowly loses his mind trying to rehearse the kindergarten play about dental hygiene without his star, Ike. Maybe people were too burnt out on Royal Wedding news to fully appreciate the satire in this episode, but upon rewatch, it's too ridiculous not to love. "What a glorious day for Canada, and therefore of course, the world."

## A Nightmare on FaceTime



Randy Marsh has slowly become one of the best characters on "South Park," and the Halloween special "A Nightmare on Facetime" is one of his standout episodes. Convinced he's found the ticket to financial success, Randy buys a Blockbuster, despite the fact streaming and Redbox rental machines have all but killed brick and mortar rental stores. The episode spends most of the time lampooning "The Shining," with Randy slowly losing his mind at their isolated store, interacting with the ghosts of Blockbuster customer past and putting his family through hell.

Stan is unable to go trick-or-treating as his dad is forcing him to work at the store, so the rest of the boys strap an iPad on a skateboard so he can virtually join them, and complete their Avengers group costume. Halloween episodes are consistently good on "South Park," but thanks to the biting commentary on our (at the time growing) fixation with streaming and the fear older generations have about pivoting to a digital future, "A Nightmare on FaceTime" is also one of their smartest. This is also the episode where I learned Randy Marsh and I have the same McDonald's order, which honestly has me questioning some of my life choices. (*Chicken nuggets with sweet and sour sauce and a Sprite, if you were curious.*)

## Eat, Pray, Queef



In the second season of "South Park," Parker and Stone played an April Fool's joke on fans by showing "Terrance and Phillip in Not Without My Anus," as the premiere, instead of the promised reveal of Cartman's dad following the season 1 cliffhanger finale. In the season 13 meta episode "Eat, Pray, Queef," the men of South Park are furious when the anticipated episode of "Terrance and Phillip" turns out to be an April Fool's joke and is replaced by a show called "Queef Sisters." The show is exactly like "Terrance and Phillip," but replaces the lead characters with Katherine and Katie, two girls who queef on each other instead of fart.

I know, I know, the premise sounds extremely juvenile even by "South Park" standards, but "Eat, Pray, Queef" is a fantastic look at the sexist double standard when it comes to men, women, and bodily functions. The women of South Park spend most of the episode queefing for fun much to the chagrin of the men, who can't really explain why farts are funny and queefs are gross without admitting they're being sexist. It's a brilliant episode in an already strong season, unfortunately overshadowed by all-time great episodes like "Margaritaville" and "Fishsticks."

## Tsst



Liane Cartman spends almost the entirety of "South Park" bending to the whims of her sociopathic bigot of a child (until now), but the season 10 episode "Tsst" is one of the most prominent example we see of how hard it is for her to parent Eric Cartman. She first seeks the help of reality TV nannies to get him under control, but when that doesn't work, she enlists the help of "The Dog Whisperer," Cesar Millan. His techniques, while often reserved for animals, work wonders on Eric and for a brief moment it seems like he's finally changed for good. With Eric no longer taking up all of her time, she attempts to befriend Millan, who makes it clear that his relationship with Liane was simply doing business.

This reignites her codependency issues with Eric, and she immediately goes back to the way things were. This episode is fantastic because not only is it wickedly funny to see someone finally put Eric in his place, but it's also a reminder of how deep "South Park" has the capability of being. The ending moments with Liane resorting to babying Eric again are hard to watch, because we as the viewer recognize how alone she truly is in her community without her son's affections.

## The Meteor Shower Trilogy: Cat Orgy/Two Guys Naked in a Hot Tub/Jewbilee



Whenever we talk about the longform storytelling or serialized episodes of "South Park," people often forget about "The Meteor Shower Trilogy" from season 3, featuring "Cat Orgy," "Two Guys Naked in a Hot Tub," and "Jewbilee." The three episodes all highlight events around the city of South Park during a meteor shower, with each episode becoming more absurd than the last. "Cat Orgy" is one of the only Shelley Marsh centered episodes in the show's entire run, "Two Guys Naked in a Hot Tub" provides our first real adventure with the soon-to-be beloved character Butters, and "Jewbilee" allows the Broflovski boys to take center stage in a whip smart satire of Jewish stereotypes and the canonical introduction of Moses as a dreidel shaped being resembling Master Control Program from "Tron."

All three episodes take wildly different approaches to comedic storytelling but still manage to fit as a cohesive trilogy with plenty of laughs. Cartman impersonating Will Smith from "Wild, Wild, West" is burned in my memory forever, as is Randy and Gerald's constant sexual tension, and the baby-bear birthday party all of the Squirts attend on their scouting adventures. The trilogy is remembered by die-hard fans for sure, but never gets enough love when discussing the all time great moments.

## The Losing Edge



Randy Marsh getting arrested while bloodied and shouting, "Oh, I'm sorry, I THOUGHT THIS WAS AMERICA!" has become one of the most memed moments of "South Park," but few remember the moment comes from an episode about little league baseball. "The Losing Edge" is plotted out similarly to underdog sports movies like "Rocky," with the gimmick being the kids hating baseball and trying to lose on purpose so they can spend their summer playing video games, and Randy training to get into drunken fights with dads of the opposing teams.

The true underdog story belongs to Randy as he gears up to face off with the drunk and obnoxious "Bat Dad," while the kids enlist Kyle's cousin Kyle Schwartz, who is a walking stereotype inspired by Woody Allen, to serve as a reverse ringer to ensure the team loses the little league finals. The drunk and bloodied Randy meme is great, but the episode it comes from is even better.

## Informative Murder Porn



I've got a lot of mixed feelings about America's current obsession with true crime, and "Informative Murder Porn" is a shockingly good takedown of people who consume true-crime stories on an unhealthy level. The show takes the concept of "murder porn" quite literally, presenting it as something the adults become obsessed with and watch together during intimate moments. As a means to put an end to it, all of the kids put parental controls on TV by locking them out with a question no parent could answer, "How do you tame a horse in Minecraft?"

The rest of the episode focuses on the parents' quest to figure out the answer so they can take off the parental blocks, even paying a kid to teach them all how to play Minecraft. The idea for the episode came from Trey Parker and Bill Hader, who was working in the "South Park" writer's room at the time. Hader has spoken very positively about his time at "South Park," and has credited the show with how he approaches "Barry." At the bare minimum, that connection alone is a reason to revisit "Informative Murder Porn."

## Hummels & Heroin



Remember that time Killer Mike wrote a song about being "Locked Up" in an assisted living facility for the elderly? "Hummels & Heroin" is an episode from season 21, arguably a season that most people haven't actually watched having fallen off the "South Park" train years ago. Stan becomes an unwilling participant in the opioid epidemic, being used as a drug mule delivering opiates prescribed to the elderly in exchange for Hummel figurines. The boys are wrangled in to help distract the elderly at one point, performing as a barbershop quartet that sings songs that uh, had likely never been arranged for barbershop performance before.

The episode features a guest performance from Josh Gad who was starring in "The Book of Mormon" at the time, as one the best one-off characters in "South Park" history, the costume-character obsessed Marcus Preston. "Hummels & Heroin" is one of those timeless "South Park" episodes that aren't limited by whatever was going on in the news that week, allowing it to be endlessly rewritable. It's also a great episode for Grampa Marvin Marsh, who is always a solid source of humor.

## Pinkeye



Comedy Central

The season 1 Halloween special "Pinkeye" is, in my opinion, the episode that determined whether or not someone was going to continue watching "South Park." The episode is a satire of horror movies, and easily the most offensive episode of the first season. It's painfully nihilistic, graphically violent, and shows the truth of Eric Cartman's bigotry when he dresses up like Adolf Hitler, only to later wear a ghost costume that closely resembles the Ku Klux Klan hoods. "Pinkeye" is classic "South Park," warts and all, and still manages to bring a lot of laughs despite its utterly ridiculous premise of a zombie infestation confused for an outbreak of pinkeye.

The first season of "South Park" is remembered predominantly by the pilot episode, Mecha Streisand, Mr. Hankey, Big Gay Al, and the season finale cliffhanger, but "Pinkeye" deserves to be hailed right along with the rest of the classics. It started the trend of "South Park" having consistently fantastic Halloween specials, and gave us our first look at the extreme levels of degeneracy the show was willing to tackle.

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## RECOMMENDED



The Real Reason You Never See Ashton Kutcher Anymore



The R-Rated Scooby-Doo Scene That Never Reached Audiences



The Little Girl From The Grinch Now Is Totally Stunning Today



Alexandra Daddario's Astonishing Transformation Can't Be Ignored

TELEVISION / COMEDY SHOWS

# The 13 Best Comedy Shows On Amazon Prime Right Now

BY [AUDREY FOX](#) / OCT. 4, 2021 4:10 PM EST





and remains competitive in debates over which services to keep, and which to jettison. This is due, in large part, to the impressive catalog of television comedies that Amazon has built over the past few years. Some of these titles are network and cable favorites that have found a second home on Amazon, while others are Amazon Prime originals, conceived and birthed as part of Bezos' master plan to develop vertical integration while racking up Emmy awards.

But it doesn't matter if you're turning to Amazon to watch a beloved classic or a hidden gem that's been all but forgotten by everyone but a small, yet devoted, fanbase. If you're looking for your new binge-watch obsession, it stands to reason that they you might find it here. At the very least, you'll certainly laugh a lot while searching.

## Catastrophe



Some of the best comedies these days rely on a collaboration between American talent and their neighbors across the pond ("Ted Lasso", anyone?). With that in mind, "Catastrophe" is a cross-Atlantic partnership in pretty much every way possible. It stars Irish actress Sharon Horgan and American comedian Rob Delaney, both of whom created and wrote "Catastrophe" together. They play a pair of casual lovers who, after a brief fling, discover that Sharon is pregnant and that they're about to be parents.



heart of "Catastrophe," but the show also features inspired supporting performances from actors such as the late great Carrie Fisher, who played Rob's mother in what would be her final television role.

## The Inbetweeners



If "Skins" is the reality-show version of high school, "The Inbetweeners" much more closely resembles actual reality. A coming-of-age dramedy originally broadcast on E4, "The Inbetweeners" revolves around the lives of four teenage boys who attend a local comprehensive school and deal with the typical struggles of friendship, sex, divorce, sex, and also more sex (the boys are pretty much obsessed with sex, is the point we're trying to make).

You might assume that a show about the mundane lives of a bunch of kids in suburbia might not be inherently cinematic, but "The Inbetweeners" manages to capture the intensely relatable, almost universal, feeling of being a teenager and having nowhere to go and nothing to do but hang out with your friends. It ran for three seasons on British television and was popular enough to spawn two movies, both of which were very successful, and an American remake, which was very unsuccessful.



Where "ER" thrives on the melodrama of life in the medical profession, "Scrubs" focuses instead on the personal connections forged between the doctors, residents, and staff at a teaching hospital. Central to the show's success is the relationship between JD (Zach Braff) and Turk (Donald Faison), who begin the show as medical interns and long-time best friends. Their bond is incredibly close. Would some people call it codependent? Maybe. But without the two of them bouncing off one another, there's no way "Scrubs" would have been anywhere near as popular as it was.

"Scrubs" ran for seven seasons on NBC before being cancelled and promptly picked up by ABC, its home for its last two seasons — arguably past its prime. But despite the listlessness of its last few years, "Scrubs" is well worth a re-watch, if only for the pitch-perfect interplay between its large ensemble of comedic actors.

## Bottom



If you're watching "Bottom" on Amazon, congratulations: You have sterling taste. Released in the early '90s, "Bottom" is a collaborative effort between British comedians Rik Mayall and Adrian Edmondson, who had been working together as a double act since their university days in the late '70s, and who starred together in the subversive '80s classic "The Young Ones," a show that defined counterculture TV programming for a generation.

On "Bottom," Mayall and Edmondson play a pair of aimless, almost grotesque roommates whose complete refusal to participate in anything approaching polite society verges on nihilistic. Although "Bottom" never reaches the creative heights of "The Young Ones" (to be fair, how many shows did?), it is nonetheless an engaging and darkly hilarious television series, one that is frequently regarded amongst the greatest British sitcoms of the 20th century.

## Mr. Bean



"Mr. Bean" is not just a popular television show. In Britain, it's a full-on institution. Even if you've never seen a full episode, when you see an image of Rowan Atkinson in his silly little suit, you immediately know which character you're looking at. Mr. Bean seems partly inspired by the childlike antics of Pee-wee Herman and Peter Sellers, while also channeling the physical comedy of silent film comedians like Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton. His entire approach to the world is buffoonish but charmingly innocent — he leaves chaos in his wake at every turn, but he clearly means well.

Although "Mr. Bean" aired for only fifteen episodes in 1990, the character lived on well beyond this program. Atkinson originally conceived of Mr. Bean in the early '80s, and the popularity of the character spawned both an animated series and two feature-length films. So, if you enjoy "Mr. Bean," there's plenty more to watch when you're done.

## Psych



Which is easier to believe: That someone actually possesses Sherlock Holmes-like powers of observation and deduction, or that they're psychic? On "Psych," Shawn (James Roday Rodriguez) is the former pretending to be the latter. One day, while solving a crime (as one does), he runs afoul of the local police department, who believe that anyone with as much information about the case as he has *must* be involved in the crime. Shawn convinces the cops that he's a psychic, but there's a catch: Now he's stuck keeping up the act, working as a consultant for the Santa Barbara PD.

"Psych" is a riff on a traditional police procedural, but with a healthy dose of the absurd to keep it fresh. The chemistry between Shawn and his childhood best friend Gus (Dulé Hill) is electric, and a huge part of why the show stayed on the air for so long. "Psych" ran for eight seasons and spawned multiple TV films that allowed fans to check back in with their favorite characters, as well as a two-part musical special.

## The Tick



The version of "The Tick" produced by Amazon was but the most recent incarnation of the famously off-kilter amnesiac do-gooder. Originally created as a parody of American superheroes, "The Tick" began as a comic released in the '80s, which was then adapted into an animated show in 1994, followed by a live-action series starring Patrick Warburton and a video game. The latest iteration, which debuted in 2016, stars Peter Serafinowicz as the titular Tick and Griffin Newman as his faithful, anxiety-ridden sidekick, Arthur.

Throughout its entire run, "The Tick" walked a thin line between comic book-style action, an offbeat sense of humor, and genuine emotional beats. Arthur in particular was given a more complex backstory and much more depth than his previous incarnations received, allowing Newman to really make the role his own. Although "The Tick" was canceled by Amazon after just two seasons, it deserved many more, and in years to come will likely develop a legacy as a show that got the axe far too early.

## The Office



Buckle up, kids. Things are about to get awkward. Like, painfully awkward. "The Office" is the original documentary-style sitcom, in which a crew of filmmakers interview the white-collar employees during their day-to-day lives at a paper company, led by regional manager David Brent (Ricky Gervais), whose obliviousness verges on malicious.

Although the American remake of "The Office" starring Steve Carell was immensely popular — and is sometimes even considered to be superior to the original (not the first time that has happened) — the UK version of "The Office" has a lot going for it as well. While Carell's Michael Scott gradually softened over time, Gervais luxuriates in David Brent's most irritating traits. Furthermore, the antics of Tim (Martin Freeman) and Gareth (Mackenzie Crook), the British equivalents of Jim and Dwight, put the UK edition of "The Office" in a league of its own.

## Community



Some of the best comedies are the ones that take a little bit of time to find themselves. Over the course of the 1st season, the creative team learns what works and what doesn't, and adjusts accordingly until it finds something really special. That's what "Community" does. Some of its charms are apparent in the pilot, but over the course of the 1st season and a half, the show comes into its own, wriggling its way into our hearts.

"Community" is an ensemble comedy starring a cast of misfits at a community college, who meet and become friends while studying together for an introductory Spanish class. But it didn't always have the easiest go of it. During its 3rd season, "Community" was removed from NBC's lineup, with its future unclear until a fan-led campaign prompted the network to commit to a 4th season, albeit without showrunner Dan Harmon and controversial star Chevy Chase. After being cancelled by NBC, Yahoo came out of nowhere and renewed it for a 6th and final season, bringing the cult favorite to a respectable close.

## Chuck



"Chuck" follows in the footsteps of "Get Smart" as a clever, inventive comedy series about spies. It stars Zachary Levi as Chuck Bartowski, an incredibly smart but unmotivated retail employee still reeling from getting kicked out of Stanford years earlier and losing his girlfriend to his college best friend, Bryce Larson (Matt Bomer). But Chuck gets a boost of motivation when he accidentally downloads the Intercept, a computer program that gives him instant access to all of the CIA's top-secret intel, directly into his brain.

All of a sudden, Chuck is a government asset, complete with CIA and NSA handlers who struggle to keep him alive as he learns how to use his new skill set and fight off attacks from nefarious forces. "Chuck" is the rare show that balances action and comedy perfectly, creating believably tense scenarios while still maintaining a lightness of touch, largely thanks to Levi's affable lead performance.

## The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel



Simultaneously brash and glamorous, "The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel" represents the upper echelon of Amazon's original programming. It stars Rachel Brosnahan as Midge Maisel, a wealthy Jewish housewife living on the Upper West Side in the '60s who, after being blindsided by her husband's infidelity, decides on a whim to embark on a career in comedy.

Midge is naturally charming and has a razor-sharp sense of humor (really, she wields it like a weapon that she doesn't always know when to sheath), but women were not exactly commonplace in stand-up at the time, especially not with the frequently ribald antics that Maisel relies on (during one of her very first drunken sets, she takes her top off and is promptly arrested for lewd behavior.) Although Brosnahan is at the center of the show (and has the Emmys to prove it), the greatest strength of "The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel" lies in its powerhouse ensemble cast, especially Alex Borstein as Midge's manager, Michael Zegen as her estranged husband, and Marin Hinkle and Tony Shalhoub as her neurotic parents.

## Being Human



BBC

The concept of "Being Human" almost sounds like the set-up for a Halloween-themed joke: "A ghost, a vampire, and a werewolf walk into a bar..." But in the universe of "Being Human," these three supernatural creatures not only exist — they're roommates!

Starring Aidan Turner, Russell Tovey, and Lenora Crichlow (as the vampire, werewolf, and ghost, respectively, although each would leave and be replaced by the time the show reached its later seasons), "Being Human" was always successful at highlighting the inherent absurdities in the day-to-day lives of people who are also afflicted with paranormal qualities, finding humor in the moments that juxtapose the hopelessly mundane with the mystical.

But "Being Human" is also impressive because, while normally comedies find success when people become attached to their characters, "Being Human" was able to survive losing each of its three leads, with the newcomers (Michael Socha, Damien Molony, and Kate Bracken) fitting seamlessly into the production and bringing their own unique energy to the roles.

## Fleabag



"Fleabag" is one of those shows that seems to connect with everyone. Its first season came out with guns a-blazin', proudly proclaiming exactly what it was, and its second season went even harder, developing each character and giving even the most ridiculous among them a tremendous amount of depth. There are characters that pop into "Fleabag" for five minutes and leave a mark, which is a testament to Phoebe Waller-Bridge's top-class writing.

In the show, Waller-Bridge stars as an upper-middle-class misfit known only as Fleabag, a woman who uses sex and pure, unadulterated drama as an escape from the grief and trauma she experiences after losing both her mother and her best friend. She's a complete train wreck, yet we root for her; her frequent glances to the camera conspiratorially break the fourth wall, bringing us into the mess on her side. To be completely transparent, if all "Fleabag" did was gift us with the incomparably sexy priest played by Andrew Scott, well, that would be enough to merit a spot on this list.

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## RECOMMENDED



These Actors Were Lied To While Filming Iconic Scenes



The Real Reason Alyson Hannigan Is Never Cast Today



Audiences Could Hardly Handle These Bold R-Rated Movies



Marvel Never Let Fans See This R Rated Scene & It's Clear Why