

By Dr Oh Jen Jen, Editorial Board Member

Surgical Shenanigans



"I don't need to watch 'The O.C.', but it makes me happy."

– House, M.D.

One could say the same about *Grey's Anatomy*, the latest medical series to hit local television. Combining the pounding excitement of *ER*, soap opera antics of *General Hospital* and quiriness of *Scrubs* and *Chicago Hope*, the result is a roller-coaster ride of over-the-top dramatics, mawkish narratives and frequent bedroom romps.

Guaranteed to ruffle a few feathers and raise a couple of eyebrows, it has succeeded admirably despite its flaws. Sandra Oh (who plays Dr Cristina Yang) recently won Golden Globe and Screen Actors Guild Awards for her role, while the show garnered nominations in the Best Actor (Patrick Dempsey) and Best TV Drama categories.

It also secured a Number 5 spot on the Top 10 list of Most Watched TV Shows in 2005 (surpassed only by *CSI*, *Desperate Housewives*, *Without a Trace* and *CSI: Miami*), trouncing

the year's hottest newcomer and Emmy darling, *Lost*, in the Nielsen ratings.

To be honest, *Grey's Anatomy* does not exactly offer anything new or particularly exciting. In fact, each episode appears to follow a to-do list of items which get dutifully ticked off. For instance:

1. kooky patients – check
2. interns fighting tooth and nail to scrub in for mind-blowing operations – check
3. at least one defibrillation scene (never mind that the patient is in asystole) – check
4. nudity (or some measure of it) – double check
5. sexual tension – triple check
6. sentimental reflections – check x 10[∞]

Is it formulaic? Let me put it this way: if you played a beer-drinking game using the list provided, you would be cirrhotic in no time.

Criticisms aside, however, I admit to being a faithful follower of the series, for a number of reasons.

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First, there is Patrick Dempsey, a previously obscure actor who never kick-started a career in film but (like Gary Sinise from *CSI: New York* and James Spader from *Boston Legal*) hit his stride on the small screen much later in life. Now in his early 40s, the scruffy hothead (*Mobsters*, *Outbreak*) has blossomed into a sexy, charismatic gentleman who effortlessly raises temperatures and got a full-page spread in *People* magazine's 'Sexiest Man Alive' issue last November. As neurosurgeon Derek Shepherd, Dempsey turns in a sensitive performance which not only makes his character believable, but also proves that good wine does indeed taste better with age.

The second draw comes in the form of an equally likeable supporting cast. Korean actress Sandra Oh excels as an over-achieving Ivy League graduate with abysmal bedside manners and a constant frown of suspicion on her moon-shaped, framed-by-a-mane-of-wildly-untidy-hair face. Ellen Pompeo provides a nice contrast as Meredith Grey, all sweet and kind but hiding her share of skeletons in the closet. Katherine Heigl adds colour in a Catherine Willows-y way – like her *CSI* counterpart who worked as a stripper before turning crime investigator, Isobel 'Izzie' Stevens moonlighted as a lingerie model to put herself through medical school.

Other players include Miranda Bailey – also known as 'The Nazi' – a short African-American resident who strikes fear into the hearts of all her hapless interns (oh yes, the Nazi's a woman), and a bunch of secondary male characters who complement the rest of the team well, but remain constantly overshadowed by Dempsey.

There is no shortage of sensational scenarios (for example, a man who accidentally shoots himself in the head seven times with a nail gun when he tumbles down a flight of stairs) or pass-me-the-hanky moments (a well-loved senior nurse dying from terminal cancer, and a rape victim fighting for her life). If you tend to wallow in self-pity, learning about the interns' 4am pre-round rounds and 48-hour shifts should lift you out of the mood slump quite effectively. Operating theatre and resuscitation scenes look convincing, while the various ethical and professional dilemmas thrown up each week should strike a chord with all doctors, whether you have a God complex or not.

I have acknowledged that even *House* – my absolute favourite medical series of all time – contains its own set of glaring faults. But I also realise that a significant part of my enjoyment comes from spotting these inaccuracies (and griping about them), and then moving swiftly on.

So while *Grey's Anatomy* is not perfect, it has its charms, and certainly warrants a taste.

Episode guides on the show's official site promise even more sinful fun in Season 2 (currently airing in the US), with a senior surgeon contracting a brain tumour (quite a popular ailment among TV doctors, I notice), a covertly conducted autopsy, a "man with an ovary", another with a "hysterical pregnancy", and some major love triangle angst.

It definitely ain't *House*, but you have to admit that these crazy surgeons are a lot more interesting than the ladies on *Wisteria Lane* and the tortured castaways on *Lost*.

***Grey's Anatomy* Season 1 airs on Channel 5 every Monday at 11pm. ■**