The Spoiler Effect: How spoilers affect our perceptions of film and TV

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How spoilers affect our perceptions of film and television
Alex Falls

Introduction
In today’s world of social media people evaluate modern film making more scrupulously than ever before. Months before a film even enters production there are people evaluating the screenplay online; hours after it premieres hundreds of reviews are accessible, and exponentially more if you include the countless bloggers, twitter posters, and discussion boards all over the internet; and every one of them attempt to make their own unique point. When there’s such a large amount of discussion occurring a problem arises. A problem that’s been characterized by the same social media culture that accentuated it in the first place, and that is the problem of ‘spoilers.’

Shock Value
How do you know the significance of a spoiler when you’re seeing it? To use Breaking Bad as an example again, many of the show’s greatest moments are the spoiler-prone plot twists because Breaking Bad is excellent at maximizing what’s known as the “shock value.” The most eloquent argument for the validity of shock value I could find reads as: “If by shock, we mean what Proust called surprise – something that so jolts our habit-encrusted perceptions that we see things with a startling new vividness — then, yes, shock is an essential component of all great art” (Brantley, 2012). The ability for a piece of art to surprise us as we watch is essential to making it great. The works that can really do an effective job of shocking people are the ones that generally have the most longevity. Even if the quality isn’t along the lines of Breaking Bad or The Sopranos, a TV show can run for years on effective shock value alone. Just look at how many Law & Order and NCIS episodes there are.

Artistic Vision
When it comes to great film or TV the best things to take away are not the plot twists, but the craftwork that is applied by the people involved. All the very best films and shows are made by artists, and all the best artists form their work as one whole story. Plot twists are used to further the progression of the story; they’re not the whole reason for it to exist. But people continue to allow out of context revelations of what happens in one moment of an entire piece of art to rule their desire to see what else that work may have to offer. Look at a TV show like Breaking Bad, every episode is filled with plot twists, any of which revealed ahead of time would outright diminish the qualitative experience of such a show; but every episode is also filled with some of the most beautifully shot sequences and terrifically acted performances ever captured. Allowing yourself to miss out on such cinematic quality just because you heard one of your favorite characters is going to die is an outrage. Contrarily, there are examples of those shocking death scenes that are some of the most acclaimed scenes in the history of television.

Works Cited


Conclusion
The cognitive dissonance towards our generation’s greatest modern achievements in filmmaking that has swept over the social media landscape is extremely prevalent. Every day people will read spoilers and decide to skip watching, rationalizing, “I know how it ends” or “I know the best part.” While there are films and shows and that when you find out those facts ahead of time it does make them somewhat irrelevant to watch, but the times where that’s the case, the work itself is what’s irrelevant. Films and TV series are artistic expressions meant to transport the viewer into a world where things outside the realm of possibility happen right in front of their eyes; only in that world, those implausible things make perfect sense. To have such a potentially potent experience spoiled is reprehensible.

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