



Lara Zarum—television TV or not TV?

In April, Netflix surpassed HBO for the first time in total U.S. subscriptions—the streaming service reached just over 29 million subscribers, a 35 per cent bump from the previous year. This is great news if, like most TV watchers, you don't want to sit through ads or rush home to catch a new episode of your favourite show or pay for 500 channels you don't care about just to get the ones you love.

Netflix CEO Reed Hastings has predicted that within the next five to 10 years, the streaming model will effectively replace traditional cable packages. We've been seeing signs of what's to come: Kindle TV is reportedly a thing. Amazon recently put a bunch of new pilots up on its site, letting viewers decide which ones should get the green light. HBO has long resisted pressure to make its on-demand service available to non-subscribers who want to watch on their own time, rather than on Sunday nights; presumably, HBO fears the streaming model threatens its subscription service.

After announcing they'd be streaming the new season of *Arrested Development*, seven years after the show's initial three-season run ended on Fox, Netflix added series and movies mentioned on *AD*, like *Girls With Low Self-Esteem*, to its site (when you click "play," the video links back to the *AD* page). And there are other Easter eggs: When you search for any program with "blue" in the title, faded blue handprints appear on the right-hand side of the page, a reference to one character's brief stint as a member of the Blue Man Group. Television fandom now bleeds outside of a show itself, and since Netflix owns both the programming and the delivery system, it's easy for them to delight their fans with these kinds of extras.

Like Netflix's other original programming, including the much-hyped *House of Cards*, the new season of *Arrested Development* will be released in one big batch. It's a neat behaviour experiment—people tend to binge-watch TV nowadays anyway—but it's also a reminder that Netflix doesn't have to worry about ratings shares or advertisers the way networks like NBC or CBS do. So far, the streaming site has refused to release the ratings for its original programming. HBO does release this data, but shares a similar ideological approach: As long as a show is getting buzz, it's considered a success, even if the ratings aren't great.

According to Netflix's chief content officer, Ted Sarandos, "The goal is to become HBO faster than HBO can become us," which is why Netflix continues to pursue high-quality original programming at massive cost. An ambitious show often tries to distinguish itself from the tone and visual style of network TV, sometimes by hiring film-industry veterans, which often results in fantastic, groundbreaking entertainment. But catching what sneaks through on plain ol' network TV can be more fun than watching a large-scale program that doesn't have to work under the same constraints. For me, the best TV moments are always the "I can't believe that happened on TV!" moments—think Janet Jackson's right nipple or *Three's Company's* entire premise.

Hastings describes the way we watch traditional television as "managed dissatisfaction," referring to the idea that you're supposed to wait until 8 p.m. for your favourite show to come on, then talk about it with your co-workers the next day. Netflix banks on the fact that people like to be in control of their viewing experience. But turning on the TV is like that childhood dream of opening the door to your bedroom and discovering that your toys have a life of their own. Sometimes, I'd rather flip through channels than download or stream a show on my computer, even though the second option means I can watch almost anything I can think of. Sometimes I want to let the TV do the thinking.

In a culture of instant gratification, some things are simply worth waiting for, and anticipation is a key part of what makes episodic TV such a rich and communal experience. Maybe when everything on "TV" looks like a movie, we'll miss those *Big Bang Theory* reruns after all (hey, never say never). We tend to assume that a lack of constraints makes for more inventive art, but limitations can force you to get creative in the first place. I know this train won't slow down just because I'm going to miss those late-night QuestChat commercials. Nevertheless, you better soak up the idiosyncrasies of your cable box while you still can. ■



For all the zillions of articles written about *Girls* in advance of its premiere last year, less than a million people watched the first episode. Compare that to the 12 million people who watched the Dec. 27, 2012 episode of *The Big Bang Theory*.

One thing Netflix shares with the cable giant is the insistence that it offers something more than just television, a belief made clear in HBO's long-time slogan, "It's not TV. It's HBO."



WHAT DO YOU SAY?

Ken Jeong

The *Hangover* star talks about being the Wolf Pack's Lucifer, another season for *Community*, and his not-so-wild life as a doctor. BY JASON ANDERSON

He's not as dangerous as you might expect.

Ken Jeong landed his big break six years ago, when Judd Apatow picked him to play an unfriendly obstetrician in *Knocked Up*, a role that reflected the 43-year-old Korean-American's former career as a doctor of internal medicine (no kidding). But while he's earned the love of comedy geeks for his supporting parts in other hits and his time on TV's *Community*, Jeong is best known as Mr. Chow, the frequently pants-less criminal who provides many of the wildest moments in *The Hangover* and its two sequels. In town last week to promote *The Hangover Part III*, Jeong says he doesn't mind when strangers presume he's as gonzo as his screen alter ego. "I would feel the same way if I met someone I knew from the movies who was always doing the kind of crazy, outlandish things that Chow does," he says. "I'd be very curious about his DNA." That curiosity factor can only increase with the character's big role in the new instalment, in which the bond between Chow and Zach Galifianakis's man-child Alan brings fresh trouble for the Wolf Pack. "I looked at this as an epic tale of morality, with Chow as Lucifer. The Wolf Pack basically does a deal with the devil in the first movie and for the next few years, Chow just keeps creating havoc due to Alan's tight relationship with him. Now Alan needs to move on from this life but in order to do this, he's got to dance with the devil again."

Day jobs can be fun, too.

Though Jeong clearly enjoys unleashing his id as Chow, he's been even more fun on *Community* as Chang, a former Spanish teacher whose personality takes a turn towards the diabolical. Since the critically adored cult comedy has never done well in the ratings, it's spent much of its existence under threat of cancellation. That's why fans breathed a collective sigh of relief when NBC recently announced its renewal for a fifth season. "No one was more relieved than me," says Jeong. "I'm still giddy from it." But he's as surprised as anyone by the hardiness of the ingenious meta-sitcom. "Something like that is not supposed to last for five years—it's not supposed to last beyond one year! It is a dream job because it doesn't feel like a TV show; it feels like I'm shooting a movie year-round. It's the ultimate day job."

The world doesn't need another Patch Adams.

Jeong knows a thing or two about day jobs, having been a full-fledged MD while he was developing his skills as a stand-up and actor. And despite his screen success, he continues to renew his physician's licence every few years, though not because he needs a fallback gig. "It's a reminder of who I am. I don't plan on going back to practising like before, but I owe it to myself to keep up that licence because I worked my ass off for it." What's more, he loved being a doctor. It's just that he had no interest in being the next Patch Adams. "Not many people know this, but as a doctor I was completely serious and intense. A lot of what I was dealing with was life-and-death situations, so I'm not going to wear a clown nose and a water flower. I keep in touch with some patients and they're like, 'I never knew you were funny because you were so intense at work; I'm just glad you had an outlet because you seemed so stressed out!' I was always a taskmaster."

Seeing your dad's tiny private parts in a movie doesn't have to be traumatic.

Jeong made a memorable entry to the *Hangover* franchise when Chow first burst out of a car trunk and began beating up the Wolf Pack while buck naked. The third entry provides yet another opportunity to behold the character's disconcertingly tiny penis. Jeong admits to feeling some trepidation about what he'll do when his twin girls are old enough to see the movie that made their father famous. "I'm just gonna say it wasn't me," he quips. "But I think our family is pretty unique. The twins are five-years-old now and they have an amazing sense of humour about life that's been cultivated by me and my wife. They know that daddy's an actor and that daddy's silly." He's confident they'll get the joke should they ever see Chow in all his fleshy glory. "I know that my kids will be able to view that career choice—or even that scene choice—and think, 'Oh, he was doing that because in a comedy that was called for.' Because it wouldn't have been *The Hangover* if Chow came out of that trunk with clothes on." ■